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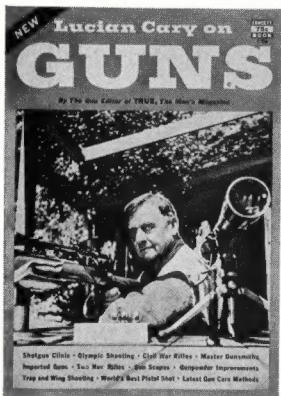
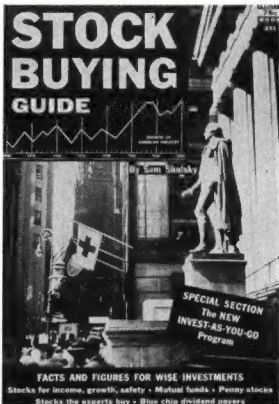
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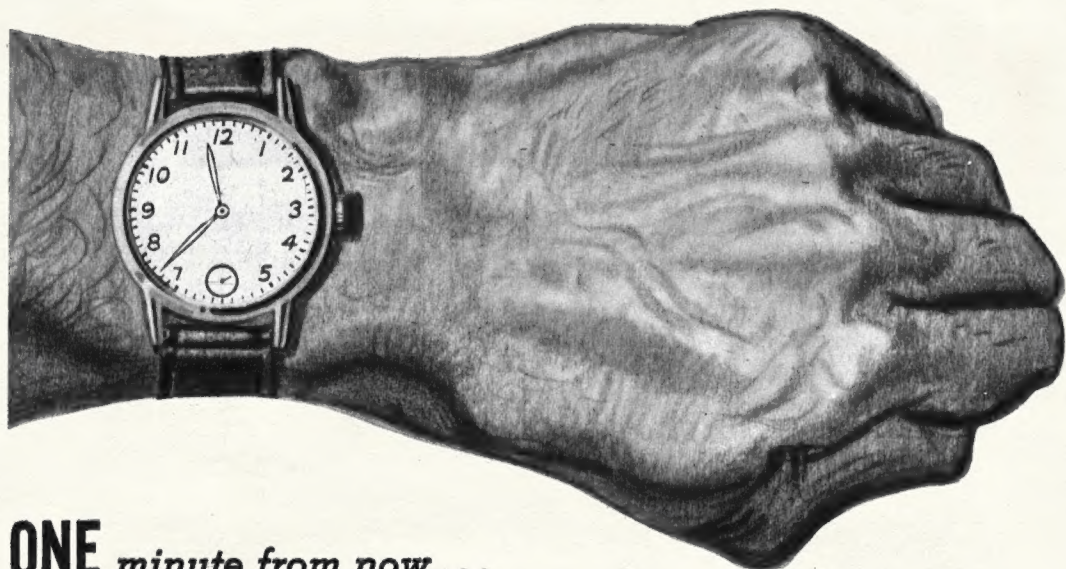
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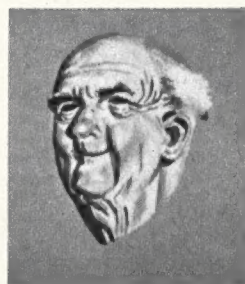
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YOU SAID IT!.... Letters to CAVALIER

MISSOURI RHUBARB

I just read a story in your good magazine by Edwin V. Burkholder about Grandpa Jesse Woodson James! Perhaps I should ignore Mr. Burkholder, yet it isn't fair to the American people to continue to harp on this same old worn out fiction. Actually poor little puny, inoffensive Bob Ford and Charley Ford never shot anyone in their lives, let alone shoot Jesse James! If Mr. Burkholder had actually done any real research or knew one single secret he would know more secrets; to wit—Jesse James did not die at St. Joseph, Mo., on April 3, 1882! Another man did die outside—his body dumped upon the floor. The man shot dead was shot by Jesse Woodson James himself.

Would you publish the truth? Are you afraid to reveal the real Jesse James story?

Jesse James III
Manitou Springs, Colo.

We can be convinced, Mr. J. Send along your story, but make sure you have the facts.

... Jesse James really died at Granbury, Texas, on August 15, 1952, with 33 bullet wounds. ...

Roscoe James
Pueblo, Colo.

... I am not disputing his story about Al Gilmore not being a real person, nor that he was present in St. Joseph, Mo. when a man was killed on April 3, 1882. But I do dispute the identification of the dead man. Many of us know who the man was, but I will only say it was not the celebrated Jesse Woodson James and I can produce proof to support this statement. ...

Henry J. Walker
Osceola, Iowa

O. K. O. K. And the more proof, the better.—Ed.

THE GRASS IS GREENER

In the November "You Said It" H. S. J. claims he has been trying to get into a harem for years—yet he writes

CAVALIER



"He doesn't even bounce as high anymore."

from Albuquerque, N. M.—home of the University of New Mexico—home also of a surplus of some of the most beautiful co-eds in the country—U. S. C. notwithstanding, I spent some time in Albuquerque, and take it from me, brother, he never had it so good.

D. A. B.
Los Angeles, Calif.

REPUBLICAN HATER

I have just finished reading: *How To Cut Up An Elephant* in your October issue. This article certainly fills a long felt need. All my life, I have been aware of something that I wanted, and have been vaguely searching for it; not knowing just what it was. But now I know. I needed to know how to cut up an elephant! Let us hope that you will continue to print such informative and practical—not to say priceless information.

Richard J. Bordeaux
Philadelphia, Pa.

P. S. I am a Democrat!

FISH STORY

I picked up my first issue of CAVALIER in June; still picking it up. You have a really good magazine, good stories, good setup. Please keep it up, and don't change. Being fortunate (we think) in owning a piece of property and cabin on the famous Klamath River, we really enjoyed *Those Hot-Headed Steelheads* by George Heinold. (June issue.)

Chriss Rasmussen
W. Los Angeles, Calif.

\$111,000 CADILLAC

Some time ago (January 1954 issue) you ran a story in CAVALIER Magazine about a '47 Cadillac car, which made a trip from San Diego, California, to New York without stopping, and the owner is hoping to make another trip to Alaska soon. The car was said to have cost around \$111,000 and is equipped with bed, bar, stove, telephone, etc. I have read this story myself, as I always take CAVALIER, every month. But I have some friends who do not believe a car of this type and price is possible. Do you suppose it would be possible for you to send me the article on this car, so I can prove my point?

I have been reading your CAVALIER for some time and think it's a pretty wonderful book. Keep up the Bonus Novels. I really enjoy them.

Hubert Gadbaud
Quebec, Canada

The proof is on the way.—Ed.

MACHETE MAN

I bought the November CAVALIER and thought it was a very good issue. I was particularly interested in the article on the Collins machete and would like to know where I could buy one. Any information on this would be appreciated.

Graham Field
Sault Ste. Marie
Ontario, Can.

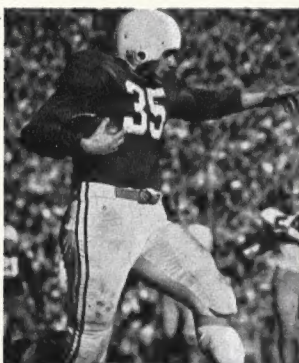
You can write to the Collins Co. at Collinsville, Conn. They would no doubt be glad to tell you your nearest source.—Ed.



HUMAN SUBMARINE. Self-made frogman makes daring escape from Reds.



DREAM GIRL. Our photographer tried for new angles, but got all curves.



WILD HORSE. No style, no finesse, but a sure bet for All-American back.

MIG VS CHOPPER. A nightmare game of hide-and-seek in snowy canyons.



CAVALIER

JANUARY, 1955

A FAWCETT PUBLICATION

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James B. O'Connell.....Editor

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BEST-SELLING NOVEL COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

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AND BE MY LOVE by Ledru Baker, Jr.

VOL. 3 NO. 19

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HUMAN SUBMARINE ESCAPES

When the Communist police handed him his death warrant, Lopata acted fast. With a homemade snorkel and frogman suit, he struck out for the border in one of the strangest escapes of all time

by Bob Deindorfer

All of a sudden one warm morning in June Oldrich Lopata knew beyond any reasonable doubt. For 11 months an awful uncertainty had played on his nerve ends, rubbing them almost raw, as the short, balding Czechoslovak clerk pondered his own fate inside the hostile Communist world. And now, shortly before noon on the sort of a day he liked to fish a tinkling country stream, Oldrich Lopata knew.

The gray paper he held in his thick, nail-bitten fingers completed a familiar pattern. It was a Communist police form, brief and impersonal, asking him to give up his apartment and furniture by the last day of June. Only in Czechoslovakia these days, there is no such thing as the police merely asking and nothing really impersonal about a notice either.

What Lopata learned so abruptly that morning in June was that time finally had run out on him. Always he had suspected that, sooner or later, Communist forces would squeeze down on him, small and insignificant as he was. As he read between the stiff, official lines of the police form a second time, he could see the shape of the future—arrest, jail, torture, imprisonment or worse. For Oldrich Lopata, the future suddenly was now.

Oldrich Lopata collected his materials furtively, rubber mask in one place, gas mask in another. In every store he waited for the tap on the shoulder that meant he was discovered.



To Lopata, the police notice meant only one thing. He had to get out of Czechoslovakia and into the western world as fast as possible. He had to get out of Czechoslovakia if he could.

At the time he received the form and decided on an escape from his homeland, Lopata was already a marked man in his town. All over the little town of Jablonec in northern Bohemia people remembered bits of his background and behavior. Without anyone warning him directly, Lopata realized how patiently the Communist officials remembered all this too.

For Oldrich Lopata like so many others, the glowering situation that June morning reached all the way back to the time of the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948 for its roots. Lopata owned a small vegetable store in Jablonec, nothing elaborate, but neat and well-stocked, the greens and reds from neighboring farms carefully racked up in gleaming white bins.

A few weeks after the coup Lopata refused to join the Communist party. That was all. He didn't go out on the streets agitating against it and did not actively work against the new government. He simply refused to join the Communist party. And so he lost his vegetable store in a calculating snarl of Soviet red tape.

Four years later Lopata sat on a hard wooden seat in the municipal hall in Jablonec listening to a notorious former Nazi official named Miroslav Kaplan harangue the crowd on the benevolent nature of the People's Republic. The whole thing got a little thick for Lopata.

"Pig," he whispered to a friend sitting beside him, "Kaplan is a pig."

Yet somebody else overheard the remark and in due course it went into a police file marked Lopata, Oldrich. The file was beginning to thicken. Lopata wasn't known as an anti-Communist, at least not then, so much as he was simply another non-Communist.

In the summer of 1953 Lopata attended one of the regular meetings of a consumers cooperative committee in town. For several months he had been attending these meetings

without saying very much, a brown-eyed, medium-sized man roped with hard muscles, full lips and a big blade of nose. His quiet, uneventful attendance suggested anything but the angry, progressively impassioned speech he rose to make that night.

"Our chairman Frantisek Hladik is a political chameleon," Lopata said, speaking softly at first. "He changes colors depending on the political wind. He worked for the Nazis while they were in power."

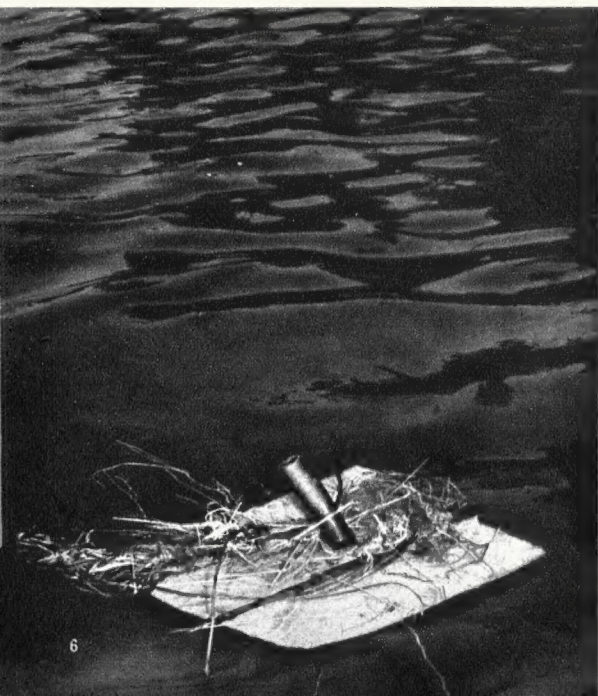
Lopata took his right hand off the back of a chair and waved it toward Hladik stiffly. His voice toughened, growing hard and taut. "And when the Nazis left he was no longer a Nazi. All of a sudden he became a great lover of freedom. He loved freedom until the Communists reached into Czechoslovakia and then naturally he became a Communist. What will it be next year for Hladik? Monarchist? Royalist? Anarchist? It will be exactly the same thing we happen to have in power no matter how queer or how dangerous it might be."

And so the police file on Lopata, Oldrich, age 40, Jablonec, Czechoslovakia, fattened again with evidence of his latest behavior.

From that day on, Lopata had a pretty good idea that it was only a question of time before they decided to eliminate him. More and more he got vivid glints of official reaction. Instead of arresting him, though, the Communists decided to harass him for a while. They hounded him from job to job, stifling him with red tape, asking long endless questions, putting him on blacklists, pushing him out of a job in an auto plant and into a toy shop and into a forest brigade and finally into a textile mill, always driving him somewhere on some flimsy excuse.

Despite this and other discomforts, Oldrich Lopata had a mute and stubborn love for his land. At the tavern his old friend Bruno the waiter knew what Lopata wanted most of the time even before he ordered. At one corner near his apartment children played, and these children he got accustomed to seeing and watching as he walked the streets. These were little things, trivial and without any great

ORDEAL. For six hours Lopata was under this cork float.



SETBACK. Wire tore his suit, forced him to shore.



meaning. But these were what he had and were parts of the pattern he wanted to cling to.

And so, in February of 1954, Oldrich Lopata considered the possibilities of his assault through history's most menacing barrier. What he knew only too well was the amount of statistical failure strung along the grisly strands of barbed wire walling Czechoslovakia off from freedom. The Iron Curtain was laced with land mines, flares, searchlights and heartbreak too.

At the same time small sections of the Iron Curtain boundary weren't land at all but water instead. The Morava river curled along the Czech frontier for a number of miles, and two smaller streams touched on the border too. Water, Lopata decided, can never be as stiff and unbending as tall, patch-walls of barbed wire.

By a simple process of elimination Lopata decided in February to escape by water as the lesser of two frontier evils when and if the time came. Because he knew the time might come all of a sudden without much of a warning, he set about making some preparations for the day he might leave.

That same week he hit on the mechanics for his escape. Leafing through an illustrated magazine in his crowded little two-room flat in a big, stone building, Lopata noticed a photograph of a tiny two-man submarine.

"I knew then what I wanted," Lopata recalls. "I would begin building a one-man submarine for myself. If I could get into the Morava river near Bratislava, I could swing into the Danube and sail right to Vienna."

A shapeless dream? Maybe so. To Oldrich Lopata, though, and to hundreds of others like him fenced off inside the hostile world, no dream is really shapeless if even the slightest edge of hope remains. No matter how outlandish it might have sounded, the submarine scheme seemed like a chance to Lopata at the time, and a chance was all he wanted.

For four months he worked long, laborious hours trying to assemble the parts for his submarine. As Lopata sat on a tall wooden bench by day keeping books at the textile

plant, his mind kept drifting away from the precise columns of figures to the evenings when he would be free to pick up a screw driver and begin tinkering with the small craft again.

"Six days a week I worked at my regular job," Lopata recalls now. "I worked from eight in the morning until five in the afternoon at the plant. Then I'd hurry on home, change my clothes and spend five or six hours trying to put my idea together."

For security reasons, and to protect a friend still inside the Communist world, Oldrich Lopata cannot say even now precisely where he worked on the submarine model. But this much can be said. It was not in his own apartment, and it was some distance away in the town of Jablonec.

"My plan wasn't so impractical as it may sound," says Lopata. "I needed a lightweight metal hull, and I had gotten most of the metal for it. A hollow tube ran through the center of the shell and a propeller was mounted on one end of it. As for me, I'd be lying prone in the thing praying for deep water all the way to Vienna."

There were successes, but there were perverse failures too. For one desperate week Lopata tried to balance his weights because the metal hull didn't seem strong enough to hold the propulsion units. At the same time, he lacked the expensive tools necessary to measure exact tolerances.

Despite all these troubles Oldrich Lopata was convinced his hand-made submarine would finally get finished for that jittery day when he knew he might have to leave his country without any wasted time or motion.

And now, on the bright sunny June morning, that day closed in on him like a Communist fist. Lopata didn't say a word. He folded the police notice in his pocket and walked off down the street under a leafy spread of linden trees until he reached a beer hall opening onto the red cobblestones of the street.

"One, Bruno," Lopata raised his heavy index finger.

As Oldrich Lopata sat there slowly drinking in the warmth of the noon hour, he scheduled time carefully inside his head. The notice said he must vacate his apartment by the end of June. By long experience in the Soviet world he figured his actual arrest would follow by maybe five days. And now as he sat there it was June 12, 1954.

"I knew then my submarine had to be completed fast," he says. "There would be no sleep for me and little time for anything else. All night long I would have to use my hands and my head to complete the work for my escape."

And so that first night Lopata worked right through until dawn. He hammered along the edges of the light metal hull, bent a part of the propeller into a wider angle, worked on a frame for the two storage batteries he needed. At eight o'clock, to avoid arousing any further official suspicion, he reported at the textile plant as if nothing had happened.

All the next night he labored on his submarine, and the next and the next. His flimsy length of periscope, made from a metal pipe and several mirrors, abruptly went out of whack. Four precious hours he tinkered and shaped it back in working order.

On Thursday night, June 17, just after he bolted a simple dinner of bitter red sausages, fried potatoes and beer, Lopata slumped in a chair in the corner of his apartment, discouraged. All at once his submarine-building program didn't look like it would possibly succeed.

To break the long nine-foot hull into sections, secretly ship it to a town on the river and then reassemble it without any assistance and only a few tools involved too many perils. As the border zone guard stiffened with more manpower, as it had for more than three months, Lopata's already slim odds of success dwindled even more.

He sat forlornly thumbing through an old tattered 1947 issue of *Mlady Technik*, a mechanical magazine, searching for some short cuts that might help with his plan. As he turned one page, he paused for a moment reflectively, then rapidly folded back the page.

What Oldrich Lopata saw in the magazine that night was an old photograph of an

[Continued on page 40].

REWARD. After more than 13 tortured hours, he was free.



Sammie Dreben dressed like a vaudeville comedian, but when the shooting started, he fought like a maddened tiger. He was

America's Fightingest Private

by General Victor Gordon

Illustrated by Gurney Miller

There were five of us who strutted and fought through the turbulent Central American republics as soldiers of fortune some 40 years ago: Sammie Dreben, Lee Christmas, Guy Malony, Tracy Richardson, and myself. We fought as soldiers of fortune, leading one revolution after another, jumping from one side to the other with happy ease, always hoping to be the first to get to the national treasuries to loot them of their gold.

Four of us are forgotten now. Christmas, Malony, Richardson and me—only the aged and the half-blind remember us, and not too vividly, at that. But people, young and old, still talk of Sammie Dreben. *Cantinas* and streets are named after him, and over in the Honduran coastal town of La Ceiba an ancient Catholic cemetery bears his name. This would either tickle or horrify Sammie Dreben; Sammie was a Jew and [Continued on page 56]

I could see Sammy way over on the right, getting his machine guns into the fight. He seemed to be everywhere.





BEWARE THE



Some shyster car dealers are out to sell you a '55, and no holds barred. Here are some of the clever tricks to watch for—from the “Would you take?” come-on to the special model deal

by Dick Reddy

Illustrated by Steve Duquette

SHYSTER CAR DEALER

Right now, the new '55 models are rolling off the production lines and onto showroom floors all across the country. These shiny new dreamboats, plus the unsold '54 models that some dealers still have on hand, are creating a surplus of new cars, and the result of the surplus is easy to predict. Some fringe, shyster dealers will meet the competition by resorting to tricks and come-ons that would embarrass an old-fashioned confidence man.

The first move of the shyster dealer is to lure you away from your solid, reliable dealer, the taxpayer who's a long-time resident of your community. He does this by offering you impossible bargains and deals that really bring out the greedy man in you. If you can't resist looking into these offers for yourself, pick a day when your mind is sharp, your eye clear, your hand steady—and leave your wallet with your wife. Take, for instance, what is known in the trade as "The Busher Racket." This system was originally started by two dealers who, shortly before the last war, hit upon the idea that the way to get rid of a large volume of cars was to saturate the territory with postcards and windshield cards making a definite offer for the recipient's present car. It may have been ethical to begin with, but here's how it works today in thousands of showrooms.

Mr. A. parks his '48 Buick and leaves it for a few minutes. When he returns, there's a card under the windshield wiper. "Would you take \$800 for your '48 Buick

as a trade-in price on a new Floovey?" It's signed by Joe Jones, a salesman at the local Floovey agency.

Now, the last time Mr. A. shopped for a new car, he could get no better than \$400 against a low-priced new car. But here's the Floovey dealer offering him twice as much! He suspects that there may be a catch, but like most of us, he's always hoping for a good thing. Besides, he's heard business is bad, and maybe Flooveys are hard to sell right now. Anyhow, the agency is one of the biggest in town and this offer is in writing. In no time at all Mr. A. has argued down his own sense of caution, and has pulled up at the Floovey showroom. He asks for Joe Jones and hands him the card.

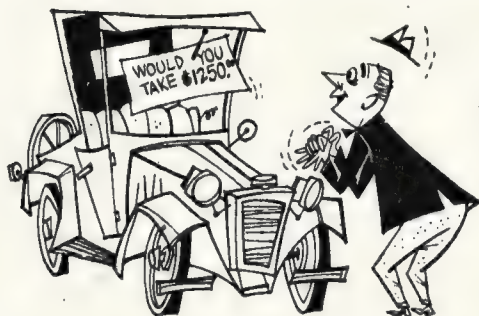
Right here Joe has to make a decision. He's about to throw the switch on the most successful racket that ever clobbered a customer, but he has a choice of several scenarios that he's been trained to use. Let's say he decides, from the height of Mr. A's forehead, that something simple and uncomplicated will do the trick.

He examines the card, nods in confirmation and asks Mr. A. which Floovey he prefers. The blue two-door? Right! Let's see—\$2,500 less \$800 for the Buick. That's exactly \$1,700. Congratulations on a fine deal. Just sign here.

Mr. A. is dazed by the ease with which he got his new car. After all, that was a terrific allowance for the old bus and he really never believed he'd get it without a hitch. He feels pretty shrewd [Continued on page 53]

BUILD-UP. To the car owner the come-on lure on his windshield looks like the best ticket he's ever got.

LET DOWN. Then the sales manager and the salesman, a couple of frustrated actors, catch him in a crossfire.





Reformer Hugh Bentley, badly-beaten by the gang for watching the polls.

“ROTTENEST TOWN in the U.S.”

Racketeers ran the town, and they made it one big clipjoint for fleecing the Benning GI's. Prostitution and gambling flourished, murder went unpunished. Here's an on-the-spot report of the National Guard clean-up

by Bob Markel

At 9 p. m. on June 18, 1954, Albert L. Patterson turned out the lights in his office, picked up his cane and limped downstairs. He had been working late, for in three days he was to appear before a Grand Jury in Birmingham. He was going to spill the works about a vote fraud that vice lords of Phenix City, Alabama, had engineered in an unsuccessful attempt to stop him from winning the nomination for State Attorney General. He stepped outside and into an alleyway where his

car was parked. Across the street a movie had just changed shows and several couples sauntered along, arm in arm. A short order cook, staring glumly out over his grill saw Patterson climb awkwardly into his car. Patterson was just settling himself behind the wheel when three revolver bullets were burned into his head and neck from close range. He staggered out of the car, turned the corner and collapsed in front of his office building.

[Continued on page 63]

THE NEW ERA: Burning slot machines, guarded by soldiers, marked end of gamblers' reign in Phenix City.





In the sheriff's office, Guardsmen release on bond a woman charged with recruiting new prostitutes for Phenix City dives.



MAN ON THE JUMP

He photographed one suicide, stopped another. Here's his own story



Bob Wendlinger

Editor's Note: To travelers, Manhattan's bridges are a spectacular approach to a spectacular city. To would-be suicides, they are inviting platforms from which to dive—or threaten to dive—to death. To Bob Wendlinger, they are the setting for some of the most exciting moments of his life.

Wendlinger is a staff photographer for the New York Mirror whose outstanding pictures of bridge suicides have won him prizes, and, around the Mirror office, the title of "The Bridge Expert." His fame is no accident. Wendlinger is an excellent photographer, as these pictures demonstrate, but even more important, Wendlinger himself feels an almost mystical affinity for the bridges. He commutes daily over the George Washington Bridge. Furthermore he attaches some significance to the fact that he was born on the spot where the west end of the bridge now rests, and that the very house he lived in was razed to make room for the bridge.

Whether or not the George Washington Bridge owes Wendlinger any debt, it and other bridges have provided him with spine-chilling adventures. Here Wendlinger describes two of them in his own words.

◀ On the bitter cold night of February 27 in 1952, I arrived at the George Washington Bridge to find policemen and a priest trying to dissuade a despondent man from jumping. He had only a precarious grip on the side of the span, and a cop warned me right away, "You'll be arrested for homicide if your flash startles him into letting go." We waited as the priest argued urgently. Suddenly the man's hands pulled free, and he plunged to his death 250 feet below. I got my pic-

ture (see opposite page). Never will I forget the quiet as he fell. There was not a sound but the moaning of the wind through the bridge cables.

▼ He had called the Mirror and told them he was going to jump from the Manhattan Bridge. It was August 17, 1954. When I arrived, he was standing on the thick cable high above the roadway. A policeman was pleading with him from below. Other cops were creeping up toward him.

I made some pictures of him and of the cops. Then I yelled, "I'm the guy you spoke to on the phone."

It seemed to be a kind of bond with somebody, and he yelled down, "Send that guy up."

When I reached the iron fence that's supposed to keep people from climbing up the cable, he said, "Stop. Don't come any closer."

I handed my camera to a cop. I saw that he'd get jittery if he thought I was there to take his picture.

"You ought to be around to take care of your kids," I remember saying.

He listened, but he didn't move. We talked for about 15 minutes. I offered him a cigarette. He edged closer and took one (below). Then he moved away again and smoked it.

Then I said that the Mirror would help him. That did it. He just walked over to me. I made a picture of police escorting him down. He was laughing and smoking my last cigarette, and I felt good.

The picture below, showing me up on the cable, was made by Mirror photographer John Hearst, Jr. I don't mind not taking it myself. This time I helped save a man, instead of watching him die. •



HIGH ADVENTURE



TIGRE KILL

The hunters drank and made love in a wild last fling. They were going to fight the tigre, and they didn't expect to come back

by Earle Proctor

When the little Guarani group set out into the jungle to hunt down the Onca, it was more than mere curiosity that made me join them. It was a strange fascination, a compelling desire to take part in this greatest of all animal hunts.

The hunting party I joined was a small one: six slight, slender, peace-loving Guarani villagers. The *tigre* they hunted would outweigh any three of them, and he was much better armed than we.

I had heard of the Onca before: a great, cunning 400-pound *tigre* that stalked the Brazilian jungles and uplands of Sao Paulo. I had listened to the tales told around the native campfires at night, and I had dismissed these tales as folklore—until that summer when the rivers ran dry, and the Oncas came down from the

hills to raid the little farms of the Guarani and carry off their livestock.

This was in my younger days, when I was in Brazil as a coffee-buyer for a large American concern. In the city of Sao Paulo, I had met and married a beautiful Portuguese girl named Maria, who has been my devoted companion ever since. We had gone to Ubatuba, a village of some 2,000, mostly half-breed descendants of the Guarani and the old Portuguese colonials who had come to Brazil in another time. We were living in Ubatuba when the Onca came.

It was night. Maria and I were asleep in our thatched hut when the *tigre* came to the village. I was awakened by a savage roar that made all the folk-tales come suddenly true. Sitting upright in [Continued on page 61]

Only the fire-hardened spear stood between us and the huge cat. Suddenly, crazed by the torches, he charged.





Leonard Moskowitz, San Francisco real estate man, shows how he was tied to bed while being held for \$500,000 ransom.

“Don’t Let It Out



It was one of the biggest, most daring secrets in history. While the newspapers pretended that nothing had happened, San Francisco police raced to find the kidnapers and the victim they’d threatened to kill

by Bernard Taper

San Francisco Chronicle

REUNITED by swift police action, kidnap victim Moskowitz and wife embrace, their agony now over.



Kidnaper Harold Jackson, second from right, sounds off after receiving death sentence. Partner Lear got life.

or They'll Kill"

It was a matter of sheer chance, apparently, that Leonard Moskowitz, rather than Alfred, his identical twin, was the one who suffered the ordeal of being kidnaped and threatened with mutilation and death.

The sons of Maurice Moskowitz, a prominent real estate man and civic leader, Leonard and Alfred are about as alike as two people can be. One description suffices for both—36 years old, small in size, with dark-bright eyes, friendly in manner, extremely affectionate with their families, and orderly and conscientious in their habits. They dress alike, in the same neat business suits and bow ties. Even their families have difficulty in telling them apart.

The day of the kidnaping was a Saturday, January 16. On that day of the week only one of them comes into the office of their real [Continued on page 44]



SEPARATED forever. Joseph Lear, facing life in prison for his part in kidnaping, says goodbye to wife.



Catch her looking bleary. That's easy, our man figured—he'd shoot her first thing in the a. m. He figured wrong.

Photographers' Dream

Anita Eckberg is beautiful any
time, any place, in any costume

Well, then, how about under the shower? She still looked great.



It all started the day that Robert Fellows, John Wayne's partner in Batjac Productions, called Anita Eckberg "the most beautiful girl in the world." As Mr. Fellows had just signed the leggy Anita to a contract to do a picture called "The Quality of Mercy," we didn't get too excited about the big statement. Movie producers have a strange habit of praising people they have just signed as this has been known to lead to the accumulation of something called box-office profits. But the pictures of the girl showed that he had a point. Next thing you know we'd called in our ace cameraman and said, in our best detective monotone, "Trail this babe. Don't let her out of your sight. Wake her up in the morning and put her to bed at night. See how she stands up to a really candid camera. Try to catch her off guard with her make-up down." Out went our man and this is what happened to him on his strange Hollywood assignment.●



At breakfast, with her mouth open? Even that didn't hurt her glamor.

Oblivious to the camera by now, Anita struck the teen-agers' phone pose—and just made those legs more interesting.



Next he found her sunning herself and——. Well, you can see.





Draped over a chair and wearing men's clothes, she still got it across that she is a woman.

He knew this angle was great, but he shot it anyway. Even brushing her teeth she's a stunner. He gave up



TRIAL BY ICE

"I don't want any company," Fred Tilton said. "One dead whaleman is enough." Then he turned and started across the 1700-mile stretch of frozen hell that separated the icebound whale boats from help

by A.B.C. Whipple

From YANKEE WHALERS IN THE SOUTH SEAS, copyright 1934 by A.B.C. Whipple. Published by Doubleday Doran Co.

Illustrated by John Floherty, Jr.

When the whaling ship *Charles W. Morgan* finally tied up against a New Bedford dock for the last time, she had earned her various owners well over \$2,000,000. She had gone out on thirty-seven voyages in all, chased whales for seventy-five years. Other whalers did as well. Other whalers had close calls—with whales, storms, cannibals. But the

Charles W. Morgan had the richest, fullest life of them all. She became the most famous ship in the history of American whaling.

The *Morgan*, her sails stowed away, her barrel-bottom forever held tight in the sand, lies at her last mooring in Mystic, Connecticut, the sole survivor of one of America's greatest eras. And she alone

On the third day, they hit open water. Tilton put the sled on an ice floe and set sail for the other side.





deserves to be the monument to that era. Whenever an old salt starts telling you that his father or grandfather sailed in the greatest whaler of them all, ask him about the *Morgan*. If he wasn't talking about the *Morgan* in the first place, he is a liar.

She had the skippers to match her—men who could take her crashing through the gales of Cape Horn, wear her off the becalmed atolls along the Line, send her frail boats driving after the huge, battling whales. Yet one of the strangest ironies of her long, strange history was that her most famous skipper commanded her quarter-deck when her hull was fast aground. And this captain was famous for a feat he performed when he wasn't even aboard the *Morgan*.

His name was George Fred Tilton, "Captain Fred." When, at the end of the *Morgan's* long career, she was rescued from a ship's graveyard, Captain Fred was her guardian. Captain Fred was a born storyteller, and he had spent most of his long life collecting the kind of experiences that were perfectly fitted to his talent. He had a piercing eye, a warm, subdued wit, and he knew with the exact timing of the master yarn spinner when to pause, light his pipe, and literally disappear behind a cloud of smoke just as he got to the important part of his story. So it was that many a visitor who came to see the *Morgan* stayed to hear Captain Fred. And so it was that another amazing chapter was added to the history of whaling, a chapter that, though told on the warm, worn deck of the *Morgan*, had nothing to do with the *Morgan* at all.

It happened to be one of the most extraordinary adventures in maritime history. As Captain Fred explained it, his eyebrows arching up as he lit his match and let it flare up over his pipe, it was the only time he knew of when a fellow walked back from the whaling grounds.

It was in 1887. George Fred Tilton was not a captain then. He was a young man serving aboard the whaleship *Belvedere*, hunting whales near Point Barrow, far up in Alaskan waters 300 miles north of the Arctic Circle. The *Belvedere* was a 400-ton bark with steam auxiliary, five boats and a crew of forty-eight men. These ever-frigid waters were at the time the best grounds for the right whale, provider of inferior oil but excellent whalebone, which was still being employed in hundreds of products besides corsets. For the whaleship owners and the more business-minded skippers the Arctic waters had one big advantage and one big disadvantage. The advantage was that during most of the summer season the sun hardly set, which meant that the lookout could do his job and the boats could be manned at any time, twenty-four hours of the day. The disadvantage was that only during the summer season could the whaleships cruise in these waters at all. The ships were usually fitted out in San Francisco, to get a head start; they set sail in late May or early June, went onto the grounds in late July, hunted the right whales through August, then got out fast before the freeze-up started in September.

The summer season of 1897 looked dangerously cold to Fred Tilton, with ice starting to form in some places even in August. But this was only his second voyage to the Arctic waters, so he could be wrong in estimating an early freeze-up. As it turned out, he was right.

Nearly all the little fleet of American whalers had gathered at Point Lay, about 200 miles north of the Arctic Circle, just a week or so before the season was due to end. Tilton's skipper was beginning to worry too, now: the ice was starting to choke the harbor entrances, the wind was blustering more than usual, and there was a wintry feeling in the air. He decided that the *Belvedere* had better start south.

He decided too late. In one direction the sea was already frozen solid. In another there were stretches of open water, but the winter gales were whirling down from the north, bringing with them enormous ice floes, so many of them

that a ship could not get through them without being smashed. A few days earlier the ship might have made it; some of the fleet had. But the *Belvedere* and seven other whalers now had to sit in the harbor while, swiftly, the ice froze about them and the ships' timbers groaned in its grip. The crews climbed down onto the ice, lugged some lumber ashore, built houses, and prepared for a tough winter. Only a few men at a time stayed aboard the whalers as shipkeepers. That way not all of the crew would be lost if the pressure of the ice became too great and the ship collapsed like an eggshell.

Ashore, as soon as they had dug in and built their huts, the captains of the eight whalers held a council. There were nearly four hundred men to feed. They had provisions only for the two months it would have taken them to return to San Francisco. Now they had no hope of getting free until the next July, almost a full year. They estimated that by limiting everyone to two small meals a day, and by hunting deer, seal, and bear, they could keep alive. But it was obvious that many would die before summer came again. Scurvy, for one thing, was a certainty. And any communicable disease could decimate the fleet in a month. Even when summer came, they would be more than a month away from civilization and food. An American named Charles D. Brower kept a weather station near Point Barrow, but he did not have nearly enough food to help. When the ships failed to show up in San Francisco, their owners or the U. S. Government would undoubtedly plan to send a rescue expedition. But they might not. And even if they did, a late spring could delay the rescue ships until the whalers were starving or dying of scurvy or some disease they were unable to treat. If many of them were to survive the winter, an overland expedition had to be sent up from the south.

Maybe just such an expedition would be forming up as soon as the whaleships were overdue. Probably the owners would realize the plight of their captains and crews and would start provisions, medicine, and perhaps even a doctor on the way overland. But to the men huddled in their huts on the shore of what had been the Arctic Ocean and was now ice as far as the eye could see, to the already jittery young foremast hands beginning to go sick with hunger and panic as they felt the wind try to whip their shelter away, to the tough old veterans already beginning to feud among themselves while they listened to the millions of tons of ice thundering out across the horizon, there was still the all-important question: how could they know? How could they be sure that such an expedition really would start out to save them?

The skippers realized there would be no getting through the winter if all they could do was sit and starve and wait for they knew not what. They were well aware that the only alternative was to send someone for help. But they knew that this was only part of the answer. The other part, the vital part, was—who?

That was when George Fred Tilton volunteered. He knew the danger: he knew that he had a lot less than a 50-50 chance; he knew how far it was, what Alaska was like at this time of year; he knew that even the Eskimos stayed close to their villages in this season. But he figured that anything was better than sitting up at the top of the world, starving, freezing, and going mad with the helpless waiting. So he offered to go south, 1700 miles overland across Alaska and British Columbia, for help.

One or two equally courageous—or foolhardy—whalers offered to go with him. But Tilton politely refused their company. If the attempt failed, he explained with practical simplicity, one dead whaler was enough. He did finally accept the proffered services of two Eskimos. They were from Siberia, and had shipped aboard one of the whalers, which had sunk under them. They had had experience in these latitudes, and they too preferred doing something to waiting helplessly.

Tilton equipped himself as best he could. The local Eskimos would gladly have traded their best dog team for a single barrel of flour; but that was the one commodity the whalers could not spare. So they bought the dog team, paying about \$300 per animal. The natives were somewhat baffled by the sled after Tilton had finished remodeling it. More a sloop on runners than a sled, she carried a single mast complete with sail. They could hoist sail, Tilton figured, to slow their speed when going downhill into the wind. And when the wind was from astern on a smooth surface, they could all climb aboard, dogs included, and ride along until becalmed. At the little ice sloop's masthead flew the American flag.

The party set off, to the cheers of the assembled fleet, on the morning of October 26. The sail was furlled, but the flag whipped in the breeze. They had enough provisions for fifteen days, the length of time Tilton estimated it would take to reach Point Hope, 100 miles southwest on the coast. There he knew he would find a tiny settlement. He would buy or beg more provisions, push on to the next village, get what he could there, and so, step by step, work his way down the coast.

For two days the going was fine, with the sled running well, sometimes before the wind, the dogs pulling strong and all spirits high. But for two days only. On the night of the twenty-eighth they were at Icy Cape, when the first storm hit them, suffocating them in clouds of snow, covering the sled and nearly tearing the tent out of their grasp. All the next day they were weathered in, watching the intermittent storms and leaden skies, digging out after each snow flurry and hanging onto the tent as it danced in the howling wind. The thirtieth dawned clear; they got under way again.

They struck the Utukok River, and Tilton cautiously worked his way out onto the ice, testing it with his axe to make sure the swift current had not left a skim patch that would break under the sled. He found a way across, but in the process he lost the axe through the ice. This was the first real mishap of the trip; they would be badly hampered without an axe. On November 3, however, they stumbled upon an Eskimo village. It was deserted; evidently every inhabitant was off on a deer-hunting expedition while the good weather lasted. In one of the huts Tilton found an axe. He took it and left two boxes of cartridges in exchange—a good swap for some fortunate Eskimo.

For the next five days the going was comparatively easy again; the sail proved its usefulness on the downgrades, as Tilton had hoped it would. By hoisting it into the wind and using the brake, he could keep the sled from running onto the dogs, and he did not have to wear himself out hanging onto it as the Eskimos usually did. But the force of the wind, or the size of the sail, was not enough so they could all hop in and toboggan down the slopes. This was no joy ride.

Tilton and his guides realized that with full force on November 8. Another blizzard hit them, this one so strong that they could not pitch the tent. Expecting a wild night of hurricane winds, Tilton decided to build an igloo; here was a chance to put Eskimo guides' experience to use. He was startled to discover that they knew no more about making igloos than he. They had been brought up in wooden houses; igloos belonged to their parents' era. So Tilton and his Eskimos scooped a cave out of a snowbank, tucked their sleeping bags into it and spent the night there. The dogs dug their own pits.

The next day was the fifteenth of their trek, and they were behind schedule. Their food was running low. At 10 a. m., when the storm showed signs of blowing itself out, they got on their way. Finally, at midnight, they came upon an Eskimo village. They were back of Cape Lisburne, nearly fifty miles from Point Hope. The Eskimos were friendly and helpful. They did not have much food, but Tilton traded some cartridges for a small seal.

Between this half-starved native settlement and Point Hope lay a forbidding mountain. To skirt it along the coast looked too dangerous; at this time of year it was almost impossible to tell whether the land or water lay under the ice, and if they got too far out, a huge cake might break off, with the wind blowing them out to sea.

Unable to get over the mountain, Tilton was forced to go out around it. And here, before he even finished the first leg of his trek, Tilton almost died.

The first day, with his two guides and the dog team, he fought his way forward from morning to night and made only fifteen miles. Ice cut at their faces. The wind battered them over. When their exertions made them breathe deeply, the cold was like a knife in the lungs. Ten times in that one day they had to unload everything and carry it so the struggling dogs could pull the sled up over the jagged hummocks that rose across their path. That night they camped on open ice, and nearly froze to death. The next day was just as bad, and the next night. On the third day they were desperate: only a few pieces of the seal meat were left. They pushed on, then came to a stop; they were halted by a stretch of open water.

As far as they could reconnoiter, there was no way around this water barrier. So Tilton put his ice sloop to work. Loading himself, guides, dogs, sled, and equipment on a floe, he unfurled the sail, anchored the sled, and let the wind blow their ice cake across to the other side. There the little expedition bedded down for the night. But now they had no food.

They had hardly got started again the next morning when they came to another barrier of open water. This time, though, an enormous floating piece of ice jammed itself across the stream; Tilton led his guides and dogs across in a headlong dash just before the floe worked its way loose and moved on downstream. By then it was only midafternoon; but all three men were so weak from hunger that they could go no farther that day.

By the next morning they had been two and a half days with nothing to eat. They spotted an open patch of water with some ducks in it. There was a crazy race out onto the ice, a flurry of shooting and shouting. All except one of the ducks got away. While struggling back to shore they came upon the carcass of a dead whale. Despite the freezing weather the carcass appeared to be inedible; but the Eskimos cut off some meat anyway before hurrying back to land. Quickly chopping some driftwood out of the ice, they built a fire to cook the duck. Years later Tilton recalled, "I never ate anything better in my life." The Eskimos preferred the strong whale meat.

With renewed strength they were able to make a few more miles before pitching camp again. That night another hurricane came shrieking down on them. In one yowling gust it tore their tent to shreds. They dug into the snow alongside the dogs, huddled in their sleeping bags, and shivered through the night, hoping they would not be buried alive.

The storm was still raging in the morning, with the snow so blinding that the dogs could not work in it. There was no sign that the gale would let up, and starvation faced them again. They would have to leave the sled and dogs behind, try to come back for them after they had reached Point Hope.

Tilton tied the two guides to a line and started working along the coast. All they could do was push ahead blindly, leaning into the gale and forcing each foot to follow the other. Hour after hour, the hurricane battered at them. They sucked ice for its moisture, but hunger was dimming their senses. Every few feet one of them fell, dragging his weakened companions down with him. Each time they managed to get back on their feet and struggle dumbly on. Finally both of the guides gave up. They lay down, moaned that they could not make their legs hold them any longer. Tilton argued with them. They [Continued on page 49]



We Tunneled a Hell Hole

Some men died. Others got the bends so bad they envied the dead. Injuries were a nickel a dozen. But still we kept moving through that 18,000 feet of gassy muck

by Ray Davis

Despite the explosion that killed City Inspector Jack Agnew, tunnel stiffers refused to give up the dangerous Detroit job. ►



The bleak construction shaft was surrounded by grim-faced men. Firemen, police officers, ambulance men, sandhogs—they waited, their voices low when they spoke to one another. Waiting.

Less than an hour before, a gas explosion had torn through the north heading of the tunnel, 110 feet below ground, where 30 men were at work. Another crew of sandhogs, wearing oxygen masks, had gone down immediately to bring them out. Or what was left of them. The rest of us could do nothing but wait.

In my hoist house the signal bell began to ring. Four bells—the signal for “Men up—carefully.”

Slowly I drew back the controller. Circuit-breakers flashed eerie blue light from the big board behind me. The 500-horse Westinghouse motor began its loud whine, increasing shrilly as the 50-ton-capacity cage picked up speed. Before me the indicator needle rose steadily from the 110-foot marker. I braked the cage at the first landing and locked the dogs.

The victims of the explosion were a battered looking bunch as they staggered out, most of them burned

and singed. Four of them were on stretchers. Others looked like they should have been. I saw Lee, a mucker, forced into an ambulance stretcher by police over his protests. Flesh on his face and hands hung in shreds and one finger was missing. Jack Agnew, a city inspector, was lifted quickly into the first ambulance and it roared away. Behind me I heard a cop say softly, “That man is dying.”

Bernie Mahaffey, a friend of mine, leaned exhaustedly against the hoist house and awaited his turn for an ambulance. I put a lit cigarette into his mouth. Both his hands were burned red; his eyebrows and hair were scorched under his hard hat.

“Had that feeling all along,” he muttered to me. “This is another hell hole!”

Bernie’s words were to prove prophetic. Before it was finished this tunnel turned out to be, as we mark the tough ones, a real “hell hole.”

Ten months before the explosion, when we started this job, it looked like a good one. I’ve been around these holes for almost 20 years: as a mucker, miner,

◄ While one miner stands by the phone that connects to the water tunnel, others wait for news of explosion casualties.

powder monkey, and now as a hoist operator. I thought I knew a "hell hole" on sight. I was fooled, too.

There was nothing in the job's specifications to warn any of us: 18,000 feet of tunnel, 14½ feet in diameter, bored 110 feet below ground through wet blue clay, and with a price tag of \$6,000,000. It was designed to carry water to Detroit's newest pumping station.

"We'll hole it through in a year," Jack Fay, a shift superintendent, told me over a beer. I agreed with him.

We proved to be wrong by 30 whole months! It was three and one-half years later, in June, 1958, when the last bitter 30 inches were mined out.

During those 42 hectic months there was hardly a moment free of danger. Heading crews encountered pockets of explosive natural gas. Water poured into the tunnel, sometimes faster than pumps could carry it away. Compressed air, as high as 40 pounds to an inch, was used to force back water and gas and bolster the treacherous ground. Air pressure leaking to the surface at times threatened to cause a major blowout and suck men to their deaths.

Men died. Many were injured. Hundreds of sandhogs came to know intimately the terrible racking pains of the bends and the staggers. And some of the most expert brains in this sandhogging trade—specialists who had successfully pushed a billion dollars' worth of tunnels in this country—were to grimly admit, "This is the toughest of the bunch."

This job started off all right. Working from a shaft sunk in the middle of the tunnel route, across from City Airport, mining was begun in both directions. The equipment was working as it was supposed to. Heading crews looked good, too. No green men here. Sandhogs had come in from all parts of the country; men with both brawn and good sense that comes of experience.

This was a shield job, much like others I've been on. Each tunnel was carved out by a 125-ton steel tube pushed through the ground by 14 200-ton jacks. Its face was bulkheaded off into four pockets and we could change the size of each pocket by adding or removing beams. As the shield moved forward, masses of blue clay squirted from these pockets. Miners, working swiftly, cut off long dogs of muck with expert slashes of their U-shaped knives. Muckers kneeling below snatched the dogs out of mid-air and tossed them back into mine cars.

This labor is fast and grueling. I know; I've done it for years. Blue clay weighs about 130 pounds a cubic foot, so a good miner doesn't cut too big a piece. A good mucker would make him eat it, if he did.

A shove was 30 inches—as far as the jacks extended—and in good ground we pushed an inch a minute. After each shove a ring of seven concrete blocks was erected. Each block, weighing 3,200 pounds apiece, was lifted by a hydraulic arm, carefully lined up to key into place against its predecessors, and then rammed home at the precise instant by the nearest shield jack. Sandhogs will tell you that this tunnel is partly lined with fingers formerly belonging to hands which proved not quite so deft while aligning a block.

We've used rings such as these on other jobs. While designed to support tremendous weight, they are by no means tight. Sand or water can flow freely between them. So can gas.

Progress was fast at first as northbound crews vied with southbound men, urged on by the distant prospects of a footage bonus. North was averaging six shoves a shift, or 15 feet. South began making seven. North then made seven for a whole week then began the new week with eight, or 20 feet. For several weeks both headings were averaging a total of 700 feet a week. It was physically impossible to do any better. Not unless we closed the shield's pockets and pushed without removing any mud at all. Don't think we wouldn't have tried that. We would have—except for the danger of damaging the streets overhead.

In the hoist house I hardly had time for a smoke. The big cage was constantly in motion, hauling cars of muck to the tippie to be dumped into trucks; picking up cars of blocks from the surface landing and lowering them down the shaft; and, in between, hauling the work gangs.

This speedy progress, which had made us all so optimistic, was too good to last. And it didn't. South heading began taking a lot of water. It gushed through the pockets to splatter sandhogs with its mud, and ran freely from within the rings. Extra mine pumps were put to work. Sand-cement grout was blown behind the rings in an attempt to close up voids. Both top pockets of the shield were bulkheaded off and progress slowed to a couple of shoves a shift. Compressed air in the tunnel was raised to 28 pounds in an effort to push back the water. Sandhogs were issued their familiar air badges, saucer-sized chrome discs worn pinned to the shirt in plain view, and reading:

COMPRESSED AIR WORKER
IF THIS MAN IS STRICKEN
ON THE STREET
DO NOT TAKE HIM TO
A HOSPITAL
SEND HIM AT ONCE TO
NORTHEAST WATER TUNNEL
CONNORS & EAST McNICHOLS RD.
DETROIT, MICH.

These badges were necessary in case a man came down with the bends, the sandhogs' affliction caused by nitrogen bubbles in the blood. It caught up with a man anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours after leaving the tunnel and the only cure was to be returned to compressed air and then slowly decompressed.

For the price of a few drinks in a local bar, we began to learn from old timers in the neighborhood something about the ground we were tunneling. Known 50 years earlier as "Connors' Crick," the area had been mostly swamp and quicksand until filled to make room for the new airport. One man told me that only a few years before, while drilling for water in his back yard, he had found gas.

"She showed thirty-five pounds pressure by the gauge," he declared excitedly. "Could have heated my house forever, but those dam city inspectors made me seal her up!"

In the north heading traces of gas were being found from time to time. Natural gas has no odor. You can't see it, smell it or taste it. But the gas detectors showed it was there. It was plain now that constant vigilance with the detectors was needed. That and good ventilation. For the latter, several pipes were sunk from the street to the tunnel to act as blowlines.

After talking to most of the victims of the explosion mentioned at the start of my story, I was able to picture exactly what had taken place.

It was the evening of November 20, 1950. Gas had been detected and two blowlines were opened. A short time later the explosivometers again showed a slight warning reading. Another blowline was opened. Now tens of thousands of cubic feet of fresh air per minute, pumped from the powerhouse on the surface, swept through the tunnel like a light breeze.

Meanwhile, the shield had encountered stiff clay. All 14 jacks, strained to their limits with 5,000 pounds hydraulic pressure to an inch, still would not budge it. Heading Boss Enos "Ace" Place decided to remove beams from the pockets and mine ahead with air spades to relieve the burden against the shield and search the ground ahead for a possible boulder. We do this often in shield mining.

Miners and muckers attacked the clay and in short time were working within the shield itself. For the third time in the next hour, young City Engineer Jack Agnew climbed inside among the sandhogs with an explosivometer and ordered work halted while he completed another test. He was taking no chances. Carefully he pumped the rubber bulb that drew a sample of air [Continued on page 51]

Rescue in Darkness



Blinded vet Fred Vines gets hero's reward from Barbara Wood, 15, and Anne Bell, 18, the girls he rescued.

By E. A. Bailey

To any man a cry for help from a drowning person is a nightmarish sound that penetrates the brain and paralyzes the body. To Fred Vines, on that warm June afternoon, it was even more terrible than it is for an ordinary man. For Fred Vines is blind. And to make his situation more desperate, he was still newly-blind. Just three years had passed since that day in Korea when a Communist mortar shell exploded the young Marine into the world of the sightless.

People who know Fred Vines around Mobile, Alabama, will tell you that the athletic 22-year-old hero has done an excellent job of adjusting himself to the life that war forced on him. They'll tell you that a casual observer could talk to Fred for hours without knowing that he is blind. His well-tanned face and the solid 180 pounds he carries on a six-foot-two frame attest to the fact that he is an active outdoors man. His interest in spectator sports is evidenced by his easy conversation. And his brown eyes seem to sparkle when he talks about the future he has planned—the girl he will marry when she finishes school next year, and the coat-hanger manufacturing business he plans to start.

But as Fred stood on the banks of the treacherous Pascagoula River last June 27, his mind torn by the cries for help from the girls he and his friend, Jim Peacock, had taken for a dip, he was faced with the biggest crisis he had known since he had lost his sight. For the first time in three years he was being called on to help someone in the world of the seeing.

A man who could see would be faced with two haunting questions at that moment. "Will I reach them in time? Will they put up such a struggle against me that I'll have to fight for my own life as well as theirs?" As Fred Vines plunged into the river he was faced with a more immediate and more burning question—"Will I be able to find them at all?"

As he churned through the water toward the cries that were his only guides, Fred remembered that 15-year-old Barbara Wood had told him that she couldn't swim at all and that Anne Bell, her 18-year-old friend, could swim only a little. But the current that had swept the girls from the shallow water where they had been wading held both of them helpless. Jim Peacock had gone after them, but he had run into trouble too and from his cries Fred Vines knew it was bad trouble.

"He shouted that his leg was cramping," Fred Vines recalls, "but I could hear him splashing as he yelled that he could make it by himself. But the girls were going out—fast.

"Finally I got to Anne and she grabbed my left arm. By

the current I knew we were in mid-stream. Then I heard Barbara again. She seemed to be about ten feet further down and just barely staying up.

"At last we got to her and she grabbed my right arm with the well-known hold of a drowning person. I was afraid we were all going down right there."

"I kept shouting at her to get on the other side with Anne. At last she understood and moved where she could hold on to me and Anne.

"Jim was on the bank and over the roar of the water I could hear him calling so I headed that way. Because I was holding the girls, I couldn't swim very well. I kept getting water in my mouth. Couldn't spit it all out, so I swallowed a lot to keep from strangling.

"I don't know how long it took. Maybe fifteen minutes. Anyway, at last the girls told me we were about fifteen feet out. My strength seemed about gone. The girls had on their clothes and getting them through the water was rough. Anne lost consciousness twice and I had to hang on to her good to keep her from going under.

"We all went under a couple of times, but we were getting pretty close and Barbara decided she could make it by herself.

"A few minutes later I put Anne on the bank. Then I heard Barbara screaming again. I didn't even have time to think about whether I was tired or not.

"When I started swimming again, I knew I was tired. But from the way she was screaming I knew she was out in the current again and going under every little while, so I just kept going. When I grabbed her, she was going down."

"She reached for me, too, and she got my neck. I thought we were both going down but I kept telling her to let loose of my neck and grab my arm. She finally did, and we started back. She was conscious but couldn't talk so I had to yell to Jim for directions.

"I guess it was shock, but she passed out as soon as we got on land.

"I guess it was shock for me, too. All of a sudden when I got out of the water I couldn't stand up. It was just like I didn't have any legs. Sort of like being in a fight—you're not scared while it's going on but afterwards you begin to feel it."

Why did Fred Vines risk his life to save these girls? He simply says, "Shoot, I just did what anyone would do when they heard someone yelling for help. It's rough hearing someone yell like that. You've just got to do something."

HIGH ADVENTURE





I Fought a MIG With a Chopper

For just a second I thought the Russki pilot was kidding. Then the 20-mm cannons thundered and I knew that he was out to shoot us down or smash us against the Austrian Alps

by **Capt. Richard Swenson USAF**

Illustrated by Ken Fagg

On the day it happened, April 8, 1952, my chopper crew of the 9th Air Rescue Squadron was stationed at Furstenfeldbruck in South-east Germany. All Air Rescue Service crews in that sector were on the double alert. Within a period of two weeks an F-84 had been fired on and a British bomber had been downed by Red aircraft.

At 0320 hours we were on standby, myself as pilot, Captain Alfred Koppel, my co-pilot, and A/IC

Frank Remer, an aero-medec, when the message was relayed through Air Control.

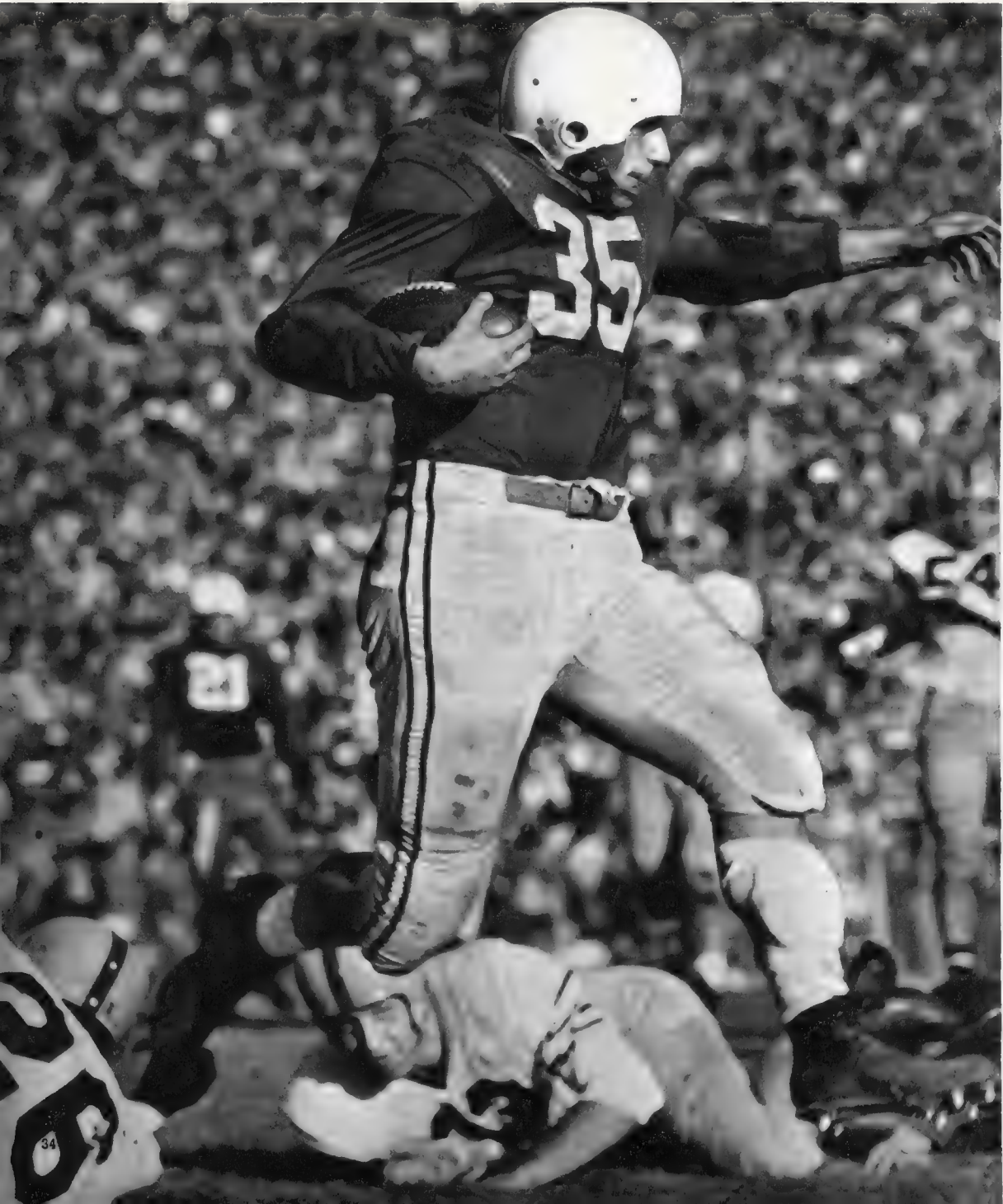
*American . . . pilot . . . downed . . . in . . .
area . . . between . . . Linz . . . and . . . Salz-
burg . . .*

That made it rough. We had over 300 miles to cover, most of it over the [Continued on page 59]

The chopper flipped over as the heavy layer hit with the weight of a boulder. Then the jet roared down.

Ken Fagg

THE HORSE RUNS



WILD

Wisconsin fans either laughed or shuddered the first time they saw Alan Ameche hit the line. But now they're saying he's the greatest fullback since Bronko Nagurski

by Edwin V. Burkholder

The freshman quarterback was happy at the sight that greeted him as he led his team out of the huddle. The varsity defense was spread out, expecting a play to the outside. That figured. It was first down and 10 to go on the freshman team's 25—certainly no spot for a line buck.

But a line buck was what they were going to get—a line buck featuring Alan Ameche, the vaunted newcomer from Kenosha High. The varsity coaches had said they wanted to see Ameche in action and the quarterback was not going to keep them waiting.

The crowd surrounding the practice field was suddenly silent as the quarterback began to call the signals. On the fifth signal the quarterback suddenly moved away from the center, the ball in his hands. Faking once to a halfback he turned and handed the ball to Al Ameche as the big fullback came across on a perfectly-executed crossback play.

Ameche's legs were driving like pistons when he took the ball, but his head was up in the air like that of a man running in a broken field. And this was no broken field. The varsity right guard and tackle hadn't been moved—they were waiting for him right on the line of scrimmage.

Every football man watching the play got the same thought at once. "He's trapped. If he's a real fullback, he'll put his head down and try to bull through."

But Ameche's head didn't move. It was high in the air when he crashed into the two veterans. It was still high in the air a second later when he exploded into the secondary, leaving the would-be tacklers sprawled on the ground behind him.

The astonished varsity secondary didn't have



Alan's prominent nose is a big butt for jokes—some from himself. "I run head up," he says, "because I don't want to stab tacklers with my nose."

much better luck than the surprised linemen. Ameche was twisting and turning, leaping and galloping like a sunfisher bronc, throwing off tacklers with powerful movements of his hips. He went 34 yards before he was brought down.

Ivy Williamson, Wisconsin's head coach, and his assistants were stunned—they hadn't seen that style of running for years. Williamson finally broke the silence with a dry remark. "That boy," he said, "appears to know where he is going and sure wants to see everything on the way."

By the end of that first memorable day Ameche had a nickname—thanks to Assistant Coach Bob Odell. "That boy," Odell said, "is a horse . . . a human horse who runs."

"The Horse," was to become within a few weeks the most popular name on the campus. Today at Wisconsin you seldom hear Alan called anything else, and if you do such a thing, students look at you as if you were mentioning some person unknown. There is a superstition, firmly embedded in the minds of the football fans that using "Alan Ameche" instead of "The Horse" is an omen of bad luck for the next game.

Looking back over Alan's football career at Wisconsin, you will have to admit that the students may have something. One of the strongest believers in the superstition is Alan himself. "I like that name," he told us. "When I hear it from the cheering section, it does something to me—gives me the oomph to make a few more yards. Hearing my own name wouldn't have much effect on me."

The nickname was officially inaugurated at the rally the night before the Purdue game. The players and a few of the sideliners watching the varsity-freshman game had picked up Coach Odell's de-

Ameche hits the line, body straight up and seemingly a perfect target for tacklers. Now a senior, he is a top bet for All-America. He plans to turn pro next year.

scription of Ameche, but he was still pretty much unknown to the student body and the nickname hadn't spread over the campus.

A lot of things had been happening to Ameche in the three weeks' time between the varsity-freshman and Wisconsin-Purdue games. The Big Ten had abolished the ban against freshmen playing, making Alan eligible for the varsity. The fullback spot, however, was capably filled by Captain Jim Hammond. While Williamson had been impressed, even if a little puzzled, by the running of the much-heralded freshman, he wasn't impressed enough to give Ameche a varsity birth right away.

The Junior Varsity-Iowa Jaycee game caused Williamson to do a quick change of mind. Ameche tore through the Iowa Jaycee line at will, gaining 145 yards during the brief time he was in the game. The following Monday Williamson moved the wild running freshman to second-string fullback behind Captain Jim Hammond.

Ameche was second-string fullback for only three games. He got into the first game against Marquette, long enough to make one play from scrimmage. Tom Braatz, the Marquette end who played with Alan in high school, did the best job of describing that play. "In high school Alan hit like a truck," Braatz said. "Now he hits like a train." One look at Ameche's 200-lb., six-foot frame and you can see that Braatz's comparison holds up.

For the next game the Badgers journeyed to Champaign, Illinois, to take on powerful Illinois. At the time Wisconsin and the Illini were the two leading contenders for the Big Ten title. Alan got in the game long enough to carry the ball 40 yards in 10 tries. Illinois won 14-10. After the game Ray Eliot, the Illinois coach, said, "We were lucky. That Ameche is the best freshman fullback I've ever seen. If we had played this game later in the season, he might have torn us to pieces."

Ohio State got some inkling of Ameche's prowess the next week. He was sent in to replace Hammonnd at fullback and in 17 carries gained 90 yards. This cinched the regular fullback for him and Captain Hammond was shifted to left halfback.

When the rally before the Purdue game rolled around, Alan was one of the regulars. As the cheer leader started to introduce him, he said, "Now we have Alan. . . ."

A voice from the crowd thundered, "You mean The Horse!"

The nickname caught on, just as it had with the players at the varsity-freshman game, and the students took up the chant, "The Horse, The Horse, The Horse. . . ."

This roar came from the cheering stands the next day. Ameche responded happily. He was the whole show that afternoon, ripping through the Purdue players for a 64-yard run and gaining a total of 155 yards. The next week, against Northwestern, "The Horse" still resounded from the bleachers and in the first half of the game Alan carried the ball 23 times for 123 yards. On the last play of the second quarter he injured his hand and was taken out.

Then something happened to the rooters. They seemed to forget all about "The Horse." This probably was due to the fact that Alan was only in the Indiana game for one quarter, but the failure to hear his nickname had a depressing effect on his playing. It was the same against Pennsylvania the next week.

Then the rooters woke up to the fact their favorite star wasn't a star any more. In the Iowa game they began the chant again, "The Horse . . . The Horse." It worked wonders with Ameche. Pitted against Iowa's famed Bill Reichardt, the Hawkeyes' All-America, Alan gained 126 yards. Reichardt netted only 13. And the superstition about Ameche's nickname was born.

Alan ended the season in a blaze of dazzling glory against Minnesota. Playing on an ice-covered field, he ran riot with the Minnesota defense, scoring two touchdowns and netting 203 yards, to give the Badgers a 30-6 victory.

This game enabled him to break the Big Ten record, of 732 yards, previously held by Johnny Karras of Illinois. Alan carried the ball 147 times, gained 813 yards, lost 39, for a net total of 774. His 203 yards against Minnesota was a new Wisconsin record for one game.

Breaking records is an old story to Alan. It started back in his high school days. Unlike most of our college football stars, Alan had never shown much interest in football as a boy. It is probable he never would have gone out for the Mary Bradford High team had it not been for Chuck Jaskwich, the former Notre Dame star who coached the high school team.

Jaskwich faced a bleak and depressing outlook when he took over at the Mary Bradford High. The year before the school had had about as disastrous a season as any team could have. Not only did they fail to win a game, but they scored only one touchdown and that was a freak fumble by the Janesville High, due in no part to any effort on the part of the Mary Bradford High team.

So Jaskwich was scraping the bottom of the barrel for material in 1949. At Washington Junior High, Alan had been a good sprinter, shot putter, basketball player and boxer.

At the opening day of football practice something happened to Alan that usually happens only to the heroes of Grade-B movies. Alan, with other high school students, was on the field watching Coach Jaskwich's kicking hopefuls boot the ball with backfield prospects returning it through the linemen. A ball soared high, came down where Alan was standing. He caught it and somebody yelled, "Run with it!"

He did and behind him lay six linemen who had tried to stop him. Jaskwich saw the run and he himself did some running to where Ameche was standing, still holding the ball and laughing. "Alan," Jaskwich said, "get a uniform. You're a football player, just what I need."

Alan was put on the reserve eleven. He came up to every expectation Jaskwich could possibly have hoped for. In the first interscholastic game on the reserve eleven he slashed through the opponent's line like it was so much paper for four touchdowns. Jaskwich promptly moved him up to halfback on the varsity.

His first year on the varsity was a complete and dismal flop. Talking about it now, Alan explains, "I didn't know anything about football and I had a lot of kid's dreams about grace and slithering through the line. I tossed away my natural style of running. I didn't make a touchdown and didn't gain many yards. I was a bitter disappointment to Coach Jaskwich."

The next fall, just before the first game of the season with Janesville High, Jaskwich took Alan aside. "Now listen, Alan, I want you to go in there and run naturally. Forget all about being a handsome-looking halfback. Smash into them like you did when you caught that ball in practice last year. Do that and we'll win."

Alan did as he was ordered. On the first play he ran 95 yards through the Janesville team for a touchdown. He kept on running for two years, breaking the state conference record in points scored, 29 touchdowns in two years. In 1950 Jaskwich, with Alan playing, had an all-victorious team, considered one of the best high school teams ever developed in the state. In that year Ameche gained 831 yards for an average of 7.8 yards.

He was the unanimous choice for the Big Eight for two years and the Associated Press picked him on the all-state teams for the two years. In the North-South all-star high school game in August, 1951, he was the outstanding star.

As spring rolled around in 1951, the modest Ameche home in Kenosha saw more excitement than it had in all the years previous. The phone rang day and night with such celebrities as Frank Leahy, Don Ameche and Bud Wilkerson wanting to talk with Alan. Frank Leahy drove

up to the house in a Cadillac to try to persuade Alan to go to Notre Dame.

Don Ameche, who is a third or fourth cousin to Alan, called him from Hollywood to plead with him to pick Notre Dame as his school. Representatives from Michigan, Michigan State, Northwestern, Illinois, Tennessee, Texas—practically every school in the Middle West—came to the Ameche home to try to convince Alan their school was the best. He chose Wisconsin, although other universities offered far more tempting propositions financially.

When the 1952 season opened, the coaches of the Big Ten faced the problem of devising some form of defense to stop "The Horse." Coach Lisle Blackburn of Marquette set the pattern of the new defense in the opening game. He had a five-man line with three backers playing close. This defense left Marquette very vulnerable to a passing game, but so far as Blackburn knew, Wisconsin's passing game had disappeared when Johnny Coatta graduated.

It seemed a logical and effective defense. But it had two glaring defects. The five-man line and three backers had no more success stopping the galloping horse than had the seven-man line the year before. Then, to add to Blackburn's unhappiness, Jim Hulaske, who took over Coatta's passing, proved to be just as good at spot passing as Coatta had been.

After 20 minutes the game with Marquette was on ice and Ameche was taken out. In those 20 minutes he had racked up a mere 88 yards.

After the game Blackburn said, "If I had it to do over again, I'd play it the same way. I'd concentrate on Ameche. He's a known quantity and he'll ruin you if you don't set your defenses to stop his rushes."

Illinois and Ohio State used the same defense with no better luck, but when Wisconsin met U.C.L.A., Ameche hit the first line that could hold him. His gains were limited to only 33 yards. Believing he had gone into a slump, Coach Williamson benched Alan for the next game with Rice and Johnny Dixon took his place.

Dixon fumbled twice in the first minute of play and Alan was sent into the game. If Alan had been in a slump, it was gone when he trotted out on the field to replace Dixon. On the first play he went 24 yards through the Rice tacklers and on the next play, clipped off 15 more. He sparked Wisconsin's 21-7 victory over Rice, gaining a total of 116 yards.

In the next three games against Northwestern, Indiana and Minnesota, he scored five touchdowns and gained 456 yards. His total for 1952, not including the Rose Bowl, was a net of 946 [Continued on page 48]

Cover Story: SEA GHOSTS



It happened in one of the small harbors down south. A giant manta ray fouled the anchor cable of a sailing vessel, and when the ship's crew tried to fish it in, the manta was on the hook. A few of the men leaped into a pulling boat and harpooned the monster.

Furiously beating its bat-like wings the manta dislodged the anchor, but the harpoon remained firmly embedded—with boat and crew attached. The manta frantically rushed toward the bottom, then toward the surface and out of the water. Leaping a good six feet off the surface, the 3000-pound leviathan crashed down on the boat. The oars were splintered and the crew crushed into the wreckage of the sinking craft. Then, with the harpoon torn from its body, the victorious manta plunged out to sea.

For centuries, manta rays had had a mean reputation, and when this particular incident occurred—over 50 years ago—it didn't help matters at all. Wherever warm water is found, the legend of the deadly manta has grown, until now it is beyond all proportion. Devil fish, sea devil, sea bat, bat ray, blanket ray (*manta* is Spanish for blanket), vampire bat, sea vampire—these are only a few of the names attached to the manta ray.

A Red Sea fisherman will tell you how "the sea bat will grab you in his claspers and hold you under his cloak and smother you!" And there are many pearl divers off our own coasts who believe that the manta will devour them after engulfing them in its wings.

Yet, only recently have we come to be treated to an entirely new version of the manta ray. Gone is the terror of the deep; in his place we find that the giant ray actually is like a great, overgrown oaf, who enjoys tossing around his body. And who simply doesn't know his own strength. Understandably, a manta can't be blamed for trying to rid himself of a harpoon, and it is more in fear than fury that he leaps clear of the water—without happening to look where he's going.

According to zoologists, the manta is structurally similar to the shark, from whose family tree he comes. Like the shark the manta has no wings but achieves the effect of them with his over-

grown pectoral fins, which flap gracefully like the flying movement of a huge bird or butterfly. The front portions of these fins grow in two curious projections called claspers. When the manta soars through the water in play, his claspers are rolled up, looking much like horns—hence, the name "devil." When he's feeding, the claspers unroll into scoops, described some 50 years ago as "writhing, clapping, finger-like tentacles three feet long and four or five inches wide." The claspers scoop up and help carry to the mouth the water and food—but not people—on which the manta lives.

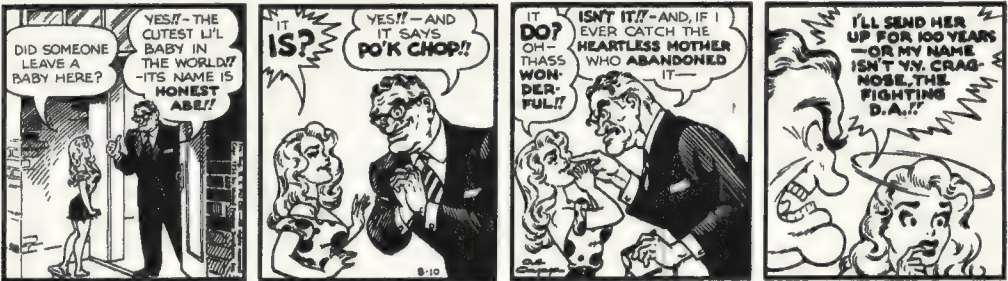
For contrary to the belief of those pearl divers, the manta ray isn't likely to devour anybody. Despite his monstrous overall proportions—the wingspread runs from 15 to a reported 30 feet—the manta is equipped with a throat so small that even if a hunk of human being were appetizing, it couldn't swallow it. As for biting, few species of manta have both uppers and lowers; most have teeth in only one jaw, and some have none at all. When fitted, the teeth are blunt, flattened like small pavement stones, and useful only to help munch tiny floating marine organisms—crayfish, snails, shrimps and plankton—which the manta strains from the water.

Through the years there have been countless reports of manta rays' dragging fishing boats by their anchor chains for miles, or knocking down dock pilings. Apparently he bumps into the chain or piling, grips it in his claspers by reflex action, and then tears off in fright—with the chain or piling still in his grasp. One present-day expert, however, has a unique theory. According to him, the manta ray is plagued by animalculae—minute underwater lice-like creatures—which cause severe itching, especially around the inner sides of the claspers. To relieve the itching, the manta scratches—as only he knows how. Passing a handy anchor chain, for instance, he rubs his horns against it, to squash the tiny parasites. With a ton or so scratching on the chain, the anchor often drags and winds up wrapped around the manta. It is then that the ray, in panic, races off, taking the chain—and boat—with him. •

—Jonathan Left



WHAT'S MY WHINE. Misery merchants took a beating from Capp when he steered Lil Abner onto a television show called "What's My Whine." At the time a real life TV show, Strike It Rich, was in trouble with welfare authorities.



Y. Y. CRAGNOSE. Ray Jenkins, Army-McCarthy hearings lawyer popped up in a strip as "Y. Y. Cragnose, the fighting D. A." Jenkins protested that he is better-looking than Y. Y. Shortly thereafter character Cragnose was killed.



GENERAL BULLMOOSE. Defense Secretary Wilson, former General Motors president, takes a ribbing from Capp's General Bullmoose who naps in a deep freeze, explains, "What's good for General Bullmoose is good for the country."



BALD IGGLE. Bullmoose's sales program went to pot when the Bald Iggle, a Slobbovian whose eyes act like truth serum, showed up. The Iggle also caused havoc in the ranks of lawyers, gigolos, hustlers and TV and radio pitchmen.



**Cavalier
of the
month**

: **AL CAPP**



Al Capp, ready for work, now has 40,000,000 readers waiting for Lil Abner's latest misadventures.

At first glance the cavalier's costume doesn't seem to fit the fun-filled frame of Al Capp. But when the creator of Lil Abner takes his pen in hand, he is as dashing as any cavalier of old. With one stroke of his ink-stained rapier, he can puncture a thousand stuffed shirts and, at the same time, tickle the ribs of a million people. Pomposity, Affection and Fraud are his enemies and he shows them no mercy. Propelled by a sense of humor that mixes social conscience with an insatiable desire to poke fun, he finds his victims in all fields and lays them out with strokes so devastating they are sometimes cruel—although no one but the victims can take time out from laughing to notice this. Politicians, over-ripe television shows, actors and actresses in the same category, Scrooge-like bosses, rival comic strips and big business constantly come to grief in the 45-year-old cartoonist's 16-year-old strip—and to date Al shows no signs of shifting his attack to smaller targets. It's doubtful that this Cavalier of Cartooning ever will. •



HUMAN SUBMARINE ESCAPES

Continued from page 7

American navy frogman, completely swaddled inside a bulking rubber waterproof suit, blinking out from behind goggles and a mask, wearing long rubber fins on his feet. Without any second thoughts, Lopata knew he had hit on the means of his bootleg trip out to freedom.

Such a purchase as this one involved an obvious risk for Lopata. He didn't know if the Communist police had not already assigned a surveillance man to him, following wherever he went, filling a book with his activities. But by this time Lopata felt beyond the point of confining caution because he really had no choice.

The evening he decided to abandon his submarine plans and start anew on a frogman suit was only 13 jittery days removed from the day the police squeezed him out of his apartment. As he spread some sheets of blank paper on a cheap wooden table the enormous clock in the brauhaus not far away tolled 10 o'clock.

In less than an hour he had a tentative list of supplies. On another sheet he began sketching models of the big roomy rubber suit and some sort of a helmet.

For Oldrich Lopata, the rest of the night was a nervous blur. He stretched out for short naps on his narrow little bed twice, trying to bank sleep for the coming days and nights. At 7:30 in the morning, Lopata gulped a mug of coffee, and rode off on his bicycle toward the textile mill.

As much as possible, he tried to complete his purchases in an easy, quiet fashion without arousing any special attention. He knew that if a surveillance man was staked out on him already, though, he didn't really have a chance of escaping anyway, and so he might as well go through all the motions until he felt an official tap on his arm. He could only do so much.

That Friday evening Lopata went to work in his apartment. By using an old gray suit as a general model, he cut the sheets of rubber into something resembling his own figure and began gluing it together in roomy arms and legs. The rubber lay on the floor of his apartment as he cut, glued, ripped and reglued.

On Saturday night Lopata carefully took the pieces out of a closet where he'd hidden them and went back to work. To make it fit snugly at the ankles, the wrists and the waist, he sliced out long triangular pieces and cemented them together with large globs of the rubber cement. When he tested the stress, though, the cement began to give way.

Lopata began sticking tire patches on the overlapping seams along the arms, legs and belly of his rubber suit to reinforce it. Sunday night he sealed himself inside for the first time. His arms and legs moved freely without causing any visible strain on the suit.

Monday noon Lopata stopped by a

local curio shop and paid a few crowns for an old German gas mask. He also bought a tight-fitting rubber swim cap and some more rubber tubing. That night he started reshaping the gas mask into a waterproof frogman helmet.

Out went the old mouth valve as Lopata attached a long length of hose to a home-made valve for air intake. He ran a heavy band from both sides of the helmet to keep it tight. At the other open end of the tubing he attached his flat cork float to keep the precious air supply above water.

On Tuesday night, June 22, Oldrich Lopata waited until after dark. Carefully he wrapped the suit and the helmet in big rolls of newspaper. On foot he started angling out toward a deserted reservoir on the edge of town.

"As I slipped into the water for my test, I knew it would succeed," he says. "The bathing cap under the helmet was perfectly tight and the suit didn't leak in any water at all. The only thing wrong was that the big rubber web feet I cut for myself like the American frogman were too good. One good kick with them and I nearly went too deep which would have submerged my air intake. I decided then to do away with the flippers."

Lopata was not really worried about drowning. What worried him was the fact that too deep a dive under water would pull the open intake end of the five-foot hosing feeding air inside his helmet under the water too. If he had to come up to the surface all of a sudden spluttering and splashing, border guards would certainly hear the commotion.

Early on Saturday morning, June 26, swinging a large imitation leather suitcase jammed with his special equipment, Oldrich Lopata walked down the stairs of his apartment building and out into the street. He hurried up to the small railway station and bought himself a ticket for a stop near the Czech-Austrian frontier 350 kilometers away. For the sake of security, though, he had to buy a round-trip ticket.

From time to time the train stopped at small stations along the way. At one of these stations Lopata shifted into a more comfortable position. The high, thin whistle of the train sounded and it lurched away from the station. Down from one of the wooden slat frames tumbled a heavy canvas suitcase, jarred by the motion. It turned over half way during its fall and hit squarely on Lopata's right foot.

"Here is the accident," Lopata said to himself, his face knotting up. "Now the foot aches. Is it broken? I don't know. I have a long hike ahead and I may have to run. Is this the end of my trip? Does a suitcase keep me bottled up inside Czechoslovakia after all my plans?"

It didn't. In mid-afternoon Lopata hobbled painfully off the train, treading

softly on the sore right foot, and walked away from a small village into green, rolling country he used to visit years before on holidays. He kept on walking, following the lines of a ragged road, the suitcase bumping against his side.

The only thing that bothered Lopata now was a series of noises he kept hearing. They sounded like gunshots, lots of them, crisp and metallic in the summer air.

"Then the world caved in on me," Lopata says. "I walked up over a wrinkle of hill and saw a barrier I had never expected to see. I found the reason for the gunshots. Spread out on a large plain, going through all kinds of realistic maneuvers, was part of the Czechoslovak Infantry. They used blanks and explosives to simulate realism in battle."

A little later, when Lopata realized these maneuvers might run through most of the evening, he decided to leave the area until Sunday. Not far from the high, half-flooded Dyje river, swollen by heavy rains, he hid his big suitcase under a thick cover of bushes beside some large linden trees.

"There wasn't much sense waiting any longer that night," Lopata says. "I walked back toward a little village where I could get some food and rest. For whatever lay ahead, I wanted all the strength I could gather."

At 9 o'clock Sunday morning, his foot still swollen a little, Lopata left the village and went hiking up the small road toward the woods.

And now when Lopata reached the crest of that hill, and turned off into the woods, he saw the reason for this reassuring silence. The Communist Infantry had gone. On he walked, angling down a path behind one old abandoned farm house, until he found the clump of woods he wanted.

All of a sudden then, Oldrich Lopata almost screamed. From a few yards away he saw his suitcase on the ground, broken open, turned on its side, terribly empty.

For maybe a minute the shock held him like that. Then he started to move, reaching inside the suitcase, looking under it, desperately scrabbling through the nearby underbrush.

"It crushed me," he says. "I could find nothing. Somebody had found my equipment and taken it away. Did they know they also took away every bit of my future?"

Slowly now, in a systematic fashion, Lopata steadied some and went over the ground bit by bit. Just as he was about to give up, he saw a gleam in the sunshine off to one side at the edge of some thick flowering pink bushes. Half-covered, almost 50 feet away from the suitcase, the old gas mask helmet lay there.

That was all Lopata found. And yet it was enough. The helmet would have been impossible to replace in any short time. The rubber suit, though, was something else.

"Rubber, that was all I needed," he says. "It wouldn't be hard because I'd learned how to put one together. Rubber and some good cement and a few tire patches. Those materials I could buy."

On Monday Lopata found all the materials he needed. The worry that nagged

him as he carried them back toward the woods in his suitcase was something he hated to admit even to himself.

"Somebody had found my suitcase and stolen my rubber suit," he says. "They also saw the helmet with its air tube. This equipment would be easy to add up as to purpose there near the river not far from the Czechoslovak-Austrian border. Were they waiting for me now?"

And so Lopata began all over again. This time, though, after settling down in the deep woods he finished cutting, gluing and adding tire patches in one long work day. In less than 14 hours Lopata rebuilt his tattered future.

At precisely 8:30 Monday evening, he carefully stepped into his new rubber suit. He pushed his legs down through the long lengths of rubber legs, and felt the tight constricting bottoms he had carefully trimmed tighten around his ankles just above the shoe tops. For reinforcement, he added two new tire patches on the seam of each leg.

His arms slipped easily into the suit, and now he pulled the top of it up around his neck and stretched it over the base of his jaw. At the waist, where there was an opening, Lopata closed the gap with fast-drying cement and stitched it watertight with additional tire patches. All at once he was completely sealed in, only his hands and feet exposed, protected and waterproof.

Only one thing remained as he walked carefully down another slope of hill through the dark woods toward the river. At the last moment he pulled the helmet over the tight swimming hat covering his skull, running the straps up over his head, and blinked out through thick goggles. The length of rubber hose fastened to the snout of the mask was in his right hand when he slipped softly into the water.

The other end of the tube bobbed six inches above the surface of the Dyje now, open and free, fastened over the cork float and camouflaged with sticks and bits of grass glued to the cork.

"I pumped in some deep breaths," says Lopata. "The air tube worked perfectly. That was my last test. A moment later, I submerged my shoulders, and then my head."

The reason for the need of his rubber suit lay in the curious course of the river closing over him now. Instead of forming a natural frontier line as some rivers do, the Dyje flowed from inside Czechoslovakia toward the Austrian border and looped across the border into Austria at one point some distance away from the spot he just entered. For the long trip downstream Lopata had to have the protection of a rubber suit partly warming him or else exposure and chills might well stop him short of his goal.

What remained visible was only the camouflaged cork float with its critical end of the house. At the point deep in Czechoslovakia where Lopata dipped in, the Dyje is nearly 70 feet across and ran to a depth of up to eight feet. For Lopata, eight feet was more than enough room to stay hidden inside his strange contraptions.

Already Lopata was moving downstream toward the critical frontier zone.

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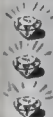
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The Dyje is perpendicular to the border in this area. Just beneath the dark surface of the river, Lopata swam easily, using a breast stroke and occasionally walking a little on the riverbed itself.

"Inside the helmet it was a vacuum," he says now. "I was linked with the outside world by only the air tube, and it didn't pick up many surface sounds. What noises I did hear like wind rippling along the water sounded to me thin and hollow."

From where Lopata put in, it was a long swim to the border area, but his plan already showed signs of success. For back where he submerged he knew only rare Communist sentries patrolled. Up ahead, where guards thickened, he would not be visible.

At 2:10 by his luminous, waterproof wristwatch, after five hours in the water, Lopata saw the Dyje thicken a little and fishhook around a corner of high land. Down he went, pumping air easily through the hose, hearing the queer, distorted sounds from above, spreading his hands before him and fanning them to the sides.

Oldrich Lopata never knew for certain exactly when he passed on into the five-kilometer stretch of the Dyje approaching the actual border. There were no signs to mark the way.

"It lay up ahead," he says. "I didn't know how far. One hundred more strokes? One thousand? I couldn't be sure how far it was and then all at once I knew I was already inside."

In the patrolled border area, Lopata kept right on swimming. By now his arms felt numb with fatigue, and the unseasonal cold of the river almost got him sick. His cork float and air intake tube bobbed on the stuttering surface of the river as he went on, feeling his way through the dark void just under the surface.

Shortly before 3 o'clock that Tuesday morning, Lopata swam blindly into peril. Thick strands of barbed wire run across

the precise Iron Curtain border and through the water. All at once he felt a sharp snag in his right thigh.

"I reached deeper under water and knew what it was," he says.

It was the sharp barbs in the wire, ripping into the soft fold of his rubber suit, opening an eight-inch gash over his right thigh. Cold river water flooded into the suit, inflating it, pushing against his stomach, constricting his chest. Only a few short yards from freedom his ally the dark river became his enemy.

Already Lopata felt the teeth of the wire exposing the whole pattern of his escape. He fought rapidly under the water, careful not to splash, until the barbs came out of his rubber suit. Slowly, without causing a ripple, he raised the top of his helmet out of the water and looked around.

Patches of dawn appeared, streaking the skies beyond the dark, rolling land off the banks to his right. Day came already to Czechoslovakia in late June, and day might expose Lopata to the border guards at the most critical stage of his underwater assault.

For even in his frogman's suit, Lopata had to cut through the first fence of barbed wire strung through the Dyje river, and beyond the first thickness lay an electrically charged wire and then another snarl of wet barbs. Fatigued, discouraged, bitter cold, his ripped rubber suit swelling with water, Lopata made what seemed to him the only logical decision now that dawn began lightening the folds of the night.

Quickly Lopata submerged. He followed the strands of the underwater wire off to his right, walking the ragged river bottom, until he reached the shades of the bank. It was still a piece of Czechoslovakia, but through the dripping goggles of his helmet Lopata saw a dense thicket of dark bush almost five feet high. Shedding water from the suit, he clambered into the middle of this cover.

Slowly Lopata opened the waist seam

of his rubber suit and pulled it off. He spread it under a bush, put his helmet on top of it and stretched out flat, loosening the soreness in his arms and legs. All around him the dying night was still except for a wind rippling the river against the nearby bank.

Day came but there was no warmth, and a fitful drizzle of rain wet the rolling frontier area. Now Lopata moved under the thickest part of the shrubbery, trembling with cold.

Shortly after 7 o'clock that morning Oldrich Lopata heard a rhythmic slapping somewhere off to the east. Up over a rise of land through the bushes he saw two green uniforms approaching on horseback. As they followed a path beaten in the land, they loomed larger and larger until Lopata could see the dog's head insignia of the Czechoslovak border guard.

Some distance away, they passed his leafy sanctuary and went riding slowly off along the river line. Lopata didn't twitch a muscle until they disappeared.

For the rest of the morning Lopata simply lay there in the bush. Shivering, caught in the steady drizzle, a strong wind blowing through his wet clothes, he doubled up in an effort to rub a little warmth through his sopping body. He lay bruised with fatigue, yet he couldn't let himself fall asleep for fear the sentries clogging nearby on patrol might discover him. In the event of detection, he wanted at least an edge of awareness.

"It was to be the longest day of my life," Lopata says. "Worst of all, I couldn't leave. I decided then to cut my way through the underwater that evening when a little light still remained. Until then, I could only wait."

Lopata was already looking ahead. In his trouser pocket he found almost a dozen tire patches. One by one he tried gluing them over the eight-inch rip in the leg of his rubber suit, trying to close it tight, trying to close it for the last perilous lap of his escape. But the gap wouldn't stay closed.

Now, just past 2 o'clock in the afternoon, he began timing the appearance of the sentries by his watch to work out their patrol schedule. At 2:20 two more green uniforms moved slowly up the nearby path on horseback. At 3:50 two more guards crossed from the opposite direction. The time lag read an hour and a half. Was that an accurate key?

It was. For promptly at 5:20, or just after 5:20, the same two guards went by again, this time moving afoot through the thinning rain.

At 6:45, two different guards walked the track 50 yards beyond his hiding place. Now Lopata knew for certain. After the next patrol crossed at 8:15 or thereabouts, he would have an hour and a half to swim through the entanglements from one hostile world into another.

To Lopata, the rubber suit felt cold and clammy as he slipped his legs into it at 8 o'clock. As he pulled it up around his shoulders, fastening it again over his chin, he began wondering if enough light would still show when he attacked the barbed wire. Tire patches closed most of the openings in the suit, but the long rip remained the same, vulnerable



"What a miserable hand."

and exposed. On this night he would get wetter than ever.

Oldrich Lopata covered his face with the helmet, snapping the straps over his head, while the 8:15 guards were still in sight. As the two green uniforms moved off, he lay hidden for one final moment in his bushes before raising halfway up and hurrying off, bent at the waist, for the river edge.

Off ahead in the water, the barbed wire fence showed grim and forbidding. Lopata submerged completely now, working his arms in a dog paddle two feet under the surface.

Reaching out with his left hand, he lightly touched one grisly strand of the wire. Now Lopata reached his other hand around to the back of his rubber suit, feeling for the heavy wire-cutting pliers attached to the suit by a thick cord. He still held the wire in his left hand as the cutters got a good bite on it.

Even in the void three feet under water, Lopata could see the wire dimly part. Through this opening he swam, flattening out, kicking his feet strongly with the current.

The shape of a thinner barbed wire showed against the darkening sky above the surface. Now Lopata dug even deeper. The thin wire was charged with electricity, and even the lightest touch would end his search for freedom forever.

Fifteen feet beyond the first barbed fence Lopata felt rough strands of the second. Beyond this last fence lay Austria, the outline of his future. Quickly the wire cutters caught hold, tightening the rope of frontier for a moment, then opening a precious hole as it parted with a snap.

And so Lopata kicked his wet, water-logged shoes once more, and passed out of Czechoslovakia near the bottom of the Dyje river.

Sucking in great blows of air from his tube, Lopata swam on for another 30 yards before he slowly raised his head. Off to his right on the shoreline a wash of yellow lantern light jiggled as a man walked up an easy slope.

Lopata covered his head in the river again and worked his arms in a strong breast stroke. For almost 10 minutes he swam on, his feet kicking, cold water moving across his wet clothes under the ripped suit. He came up again and the lantern had disappeared.

On one bank he faintly saw the shape of a wooden cattle fence running back from the river. It was enough to see there in the darkness. It was, for Lopata, all he wanted to see. Scrambling ashore, he leaned across the fence, pulled off the suit and helmet and moved through the night into the west and freedom.

For Oldrich Lopata, the grip of his long ordeal ended almost a mile up the Austrian bank. As he reached into his pocket and felt the wadded, wet lump of police notice asking him to vacate his apartment back in Jablonec, Lopata began smiling, really smiling, for the first time in four days. For he realized then that he had faithfully observed at least a part of the Communist law.

Lopata had vacated his apartment all right. •

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Continued from page 19

estate firm but they have no set pattern as to which it will be. Leonard decided he would be the one to work on this particular day.

Shortly before noon a man phoned. Leonard talked with him, then put on his hat and coat and left the office, telling his father that he was going to show a house to a client and would be back soon.

At 5:10 p. m. a mailman rang the doorbell of the large house in the fashionable Sealcliff district where Leonard's father lives. Leonard's six-year-old niece, Sandra Wishan, opened the door and the mailman, with a cheerful flourish, said, "Special Delivery, little lady."

It was addressed to Maurice Moskovitz. On the face of the envelope was printed "URGENT." Inside it, in Leonard's handwriting on ruled stationery from a cheap tablet, was this pencilled note:

"Dear Dad:

I am being held prisoner by some men. They want \$500,000. I won't be turned loose until it's paid. There are 5 men and they each want \$100,000. Get it for them right away or you won't see me again. Do not let police or authorities know or they'll kill me now if it comes out in the newspapers.

I have the promise of the leader I will be turned loose as soon as ransom is paid.

If there is any interference they'll stop at nothing. Please, please do as they say.

As soon as the money is ready, put an ad in the Examiner under personal column: 'L, ready to conclude sale, please advise when and where to deliver' (Be sure this is word for word).

*They want \$100,000 in 20's
200,000 in 50's
200,000 in 100's*

\$500,000

All bills must be old, they must not be marked and not in sequence and not from just one Federal Reserve Bank. All money to be placed in one large suitcase with 4 wide web straps around it as per my drawing

(Here followed a rough sketch of a suitcase bound by straps.)

Please don't let anyone know and please don't let me down. Tell Lesley (Leonard's wife) don't let it out or they'll kill. Tell her to make any excuse. I had 2:30 appointment to show 130 Westdale to Mrs. H. Slowsky. Cancel appointment for me.

"Lennie"

Mr. Moskovitz said later, "When I first saw that note, I could hardly read it—all the words spelled death."

Distressed as he was, nevertheless he did not for a moment consider the possibility of trying to meet this situation without the help of the police. As a civic man, he has always had more than ordinary faith in his community and its

institutions. He notified the police immediately.

It must be admitted, however, that the first thing the police did on this case was to commit a serious blunder. At 6:32 p. m. they put out over the police radio and teletype system the routine all-points bulletin: "POSSIBLE KIDNAPING FOR RANSOM . . . ALLEGED VICTIM, LEONARD MOSKOVITZ. . ."

It was the only blunder the police were to make during the whole case. From then on their work was extraordinarily thorough, devoted and at times inspired, earning nation-wide commendation. But as one police inspector said recently, "I still get a sinking feeling when I think of how close the case came to falling apart right at the beginning."

A few minutes after the bulletin was issued, Police Chief Michael Gaffey put Captain James English, chief of inspectors, in charge of the case. His first step was to cancel the bulletin. He was convinced that the only hope for saving Leonard's life lay in keeping secret from the kidnapers the fact that the police had been called into the case.

It was a tricky problem—to put on the biggest police effort in San Francisco's history and yet to keep it secret and do it in such a way that the kidnapers would not spot the unusual activity. More than 500 uniformed police and 145 plain clothes officers were put on the case. The beat patrolmen searched block by block for the car Leonard had driven when he left his office. A squad of inspectors checked the hotels.

Special arrangements were made regarding communications. The inspectors were ordered to check in by telephone only, but a code signal—"Inspectors Five"—was agreed on should an emergency radio message be necessary.

The next day was Sunday. You would expect the Sunday papers to be full of this story. It was big news—a kidnaping asking the second largest ransom ever demanded in the United States, the most intensive police hunt ever known in San Francisco.

But there wasn't a word of this to be found in the papers.

Voluntarily, after Captain English had explained the urgency of the situation, the editors agreed on an unprecedented news blackout.

The purpose of this, of course, was to mislead the kidnapers into believing their crime had not been reported and to lull them into careless over-confidence.

Taking part in this voluntary secrecy pact were not only the four San Francisco newspapers but all the wire services and radio and television stations.

In return for their cooperation, the police treated news representatives with courtesy and confidence. A special press room was set up in the Hall of Justice near the Homicide Bureau. Here fre-

quent briefings were given them by District Attorney Thomas C. Lynch, who worked closely with Captain English throughout the case.

This went on for three days, in what has been called "the best kept secret in American journalism." During this time the story was staffed, reported, copy-read, set up in type just like any other fast-breaking headline story, the only difference being that none of it was being published. All the type was marked "HOLD FOR RELEASE."

By this time the number of people who, of necessity, had been let in on the secret was probably somewhere in the thousands.

If newsmen had any doubts about the value of their self-imposed censorship, those doubts were resolved Sunday afternoon when the second special delivery note from Leonard arrived. This note, once again in the victim's own handwriting, repeated his fear of being killed if the family tried to cross up the kidnapers by going to the police or taking down the serial numbers of the ransom money. Pleading with his family to hurry, the note then said, "Nothing has been reported to the newspapers, for which I thank God."

In strict accuracy, it might be said that one small item concerning the kidnaping did appear in a San Francisco newspaper that evening. It meant nothing except to those who were watching for it. It meant everything to those involved in the drama. It was to be found in the personal ads section of the Monday Examiner, whose first edition reaches the streets about 6 p. m. on Sunday.

It said: "L: Unable to raise sale price. Wish to negotiate. Please contact us."

Only incidentally was the message in the Examiner intended as a means of stalling or forcing the kidnapers into making contact with the family. Literally, it was a true statement. Even a multimillionaire would have had trouble raising the ransom over the weekend. There wasn't that much money—in bills of the denominations specified—in circulation in all of San Francisco.

Maurice Moskovitz is well-to-do but not fabulously wealthy. His assets, which total somewhat under \$400,000, are in the form of several pieces of real estate. There is no way to stuff that kind of wealth into a suitcase as ransom.

Getting real estate converted into cash is not a matter of a few moments activity. Normally it is a slow, involved and cumbersome process.

At 12:25 p. m. Monday the kidnapers made their first contact with the family. It caught everybody by surprise. The police had figured that the kidnapers would be getting in touch with the father at his home. Instead, this phone call came in to the Twins Real Estate office.

Leonard's twin brother, Alfred, was at the office, not because he had any heart to work but because the police had instructed all members of the family to try to act as if everything was normal. He answered the phone and heard a voice say, "Ollie?" That's his nickname, but he did not recognize the voice.

"Yes—"

"How much money you got? Can you

raise three hundred thousand dollars by midnight tomorrow?"

Stammering, at a loss what to say and trying at the same time, by waving at his office manager, to get him to notify the police of the call, Alfred replied, "Wait a minute, while I look at my checkbook."

The man at the other end was not interested in giving him time to do that. "Never mind, never mind!" he broke in. "The kid's sick and we want to get rid of him." He told Alfred to follow the original instructions in regard to a message in the next day's *Examiner* agreeing to the terms. "You'll hear from us," he said and hung up.

The call had lasted about two minutes and there had been no chance to trace it.

A second note came the next day. Again written by Leonard, it said the kidnapers were furious over the family's failure to raise the \$500,000 and had been debating whether to kill him rather than take less. They had finally decided they would accept \$300,000, the note said.

Leonard's father now had the most painful decision of his life to make. Would he try to raise the \$300,000 for a ransom or would he authorize the police to prepare a suitcase full of blank paper, phony money?

"You may lose the money and lose your son too," Captain English told him. "I can't advise you. You'll have to make up your own mind."

Leonard's father replied, "If there's even the slightest chance paying the money will save my son's life, I want to pay it."

But how was he going to raise that much money in a few hours? The only hope was his real estate.

The Bank of America cut red tape and quickly loaned him all the rules would allow, \$200,000.

Into the breach at this point stepped as unlikely a candidate for humanitarian benefactor as the general public could have imagined, Boyd Puccinelli, a member of a profession which has a reputation for being callous. He is a bail-bond broker. Among his friends he is noted for loyalty and a warm heart.

He heard the anxious discussions at the Moskovitz home. During the afternoon he left for a few hours. When he returned, he had with him the entire \$100,000 needed—including \$60,000 cash and deeds of trust for the rest. He pressed this on Mr. Moskovitz as a loan without terms or interest.

Late into the night a bank employee worked, sorting out the \$20, \$50, and \$100 bills—8,000 bills all told—that would make up the \$300,000, and packing them into the suitcase. At eight next morning a member of the family was to call for the suitcase.

The Tuesday *Examiner* was already on the streets in its early evening edition. In its personal ad section was the message: "L: Ready to conclude sale. Please advise when and where to deliver."

The main hopes now revolved around the possibility of another call and the chance that the telephone company might be able to trace it.

In expectation of such a possibility, Douglas Hayden, chief special agent for the telephone company, joined the police officials at the Hall of Justice that evening, prepared to work the night through with them if necessary. He put shifts of 18 additional switchmen on round the clock duty to watch for the expected call. Alarm bells were installed in the relevant central offices to clang out when a call came in for Leonard's, Alfred's, or Mr. Moskovitz's phones.

The evening hours wore away. Leonard's father and mother finally went to sleep, after taking sedatives. At his own home Alfred waited, fretting. In some ways he was suffering perhaps even more acutely than anyone else in the family. Parting identical twins seems sometimes almost as painful as if they were physically joined to each other.

Midnight passed. Then at 12:38 a. m. the phone rang. Alfred let it ring four times, as he had been instructed to do, before answering.

"Hello, Ollie," a voice said. It was Leonard's voice. It went on to tell Ollie that he was being permitted to call so that the family would know he was still alive but that he wouldn't be alive much longer if the family failed to come through.

Alfred's first joyous relief at hearing his brother's voice was followed by sus-

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picion. As a detective story fan, he had read instances of murderers recording their victims voices on tape before they killed them.

"What do you think of when I say one-two, three, four, five?" Alfred asked.

Lennie's voice answered, "Why that's the date we got out of the Air Force—twelve-three-forty-five."

Now Alfred was completely reassured but thought more questions like this would be a good way of stalling if he could get away with it.

"What is the name of someone we know in Butte, Montana?" Alfred asked.

"Flora Schwartz," Leonard answered. "I can't hear you. We must have a bad connection," Alfred said, the line was actually as clear as he could have wanted.

Leonard repeated the name. Alfred started to ask another delaying question but another voice cut in, the same voice he had heard at his office the day before.

"That's enough of that. How about it, you got the money?" the voice said.

"We had it. We had it all ready for you. Can you hear me? I can't hear you very well."

"Yeah, yeah. Hurry up."

"It's all in the suitcase—three hundred thousand dollars, just the way you told us." He paused, feigning a coughing spell. "Excuse me. I just got over the flu. My head's still all stopped up. Maybe that's why I can't hear you well."

"Where's the money?"

"What?"

"Where've you got the money?" the man repeated.

"It's in the bank now. We didn't dare keep that much money unprotected in the house at night."

"Yeah, I understand."

"We can pick it up again at eight in the morning. We're willing to turn it over any way you say. All we care about is getting Lennie back—"

"O. K."

"I'm just wondering," Alfred put in quickly as he heard the man beginning to hang up. "I'm very tired. Shall I go to bed, or will I be hearing from you again?"

"You can go to bed if you want," the man replied, "but you'll probably be getting another call pretty soon."

The man hung up. Alfred had played his part excellently, so well in fact that the kidnaper with whom he talked, after his capture said ruefully, and in a rather disillusioned tone as if his faith in mankind had been betrayed, "That fellow Alfred sounded so sincere that I believed him. I didn't think you could fake sincerity like that."

The call had lasted almost five minutes. Before the line went dead, switchmen Paul Duncan and Gerald Tauscher in the San Mateo office had been able to back-trace far enough to discover that the call had come from San Francisco, through either the Mission or Market telephone offices.

Hayden called the chief operators at those offices and asked them to examine their toll records. In about an hour the Market operator found what Hayden wanted to know. At 12:38 a. m. a call had been placed to DIAMOND 4-8020 (Alfred's number) from MONTROSE 4-9989.

As had been expected, the call had been placed from a public phone booth. The company's files showed it to be located in the southwest part of the city. Captain English now put his special squad of inspectors, with their private cars, into action.

Each was assigned a small area to patrol in their cars, watching out for suspicious persons, keeping their eye on public phone booths, and alert to move instantly in response to the crucial orders which might at last break the three day radio silence.

Meanwhile Hayden was calling the chief operators in each central office and having them paste up Alfred's phone number in front of each of the 500 telephone operators in San Francisco and on the Peninsula. Hayden did not tell them what was involved, nor had he told the switchmen. He told them, "Try to hold on the line anybody making a call to this number. It may be the most important call of your life."

About an hour after this, at 2:33 a. m.,

Miss Claire Moon, a telephone operator at San Francisco's Market office, plugged in a jack on her switchboard in response to the usual signal indicating a customer was wanting a line, and said, "Operator."

"Diamond 4-8020, please."

"What number did you say?"

"Diamond 4-8020."

It was the number pasted up before her.

She attracted the attention of her chief operator, Mrs. Isabelle Kesler. On a special line Mrs. Kesler immediately called Hayden at the operation's headquarters in the Hall of Justice.

He was sitting in the midst of the top men directing the operation—Captain English, District Attorney Tom Lynch, Chief Homicide Inspector Frank Ahern and the others—and Hayden repeated aloud to them what he was hearing.

"He's telling Alfred to get a pencil and paper. He's asking if the phone is tapped. Now he's telling him this is the way he wants it handled and to disregard all previous instructions. Now—What's that—he's about to hang up? Hold him, somehow! Hello! Hello! What are you saying, there's a policeman there?"

Hayden turned and shouted to the men sitting around him with astonished expressions on their faces, "There's a policeman there! He's got him!"

Some of those who were in the operations room recall that for a moment everybody was flabbergasted. The whole thing seemed incredible and too good to be true.

Then a phone on Captain English's desk rang. It was Homicide Inspector Al Nelder reporting he had caught one of the kidnappers but still did not know where the others were.

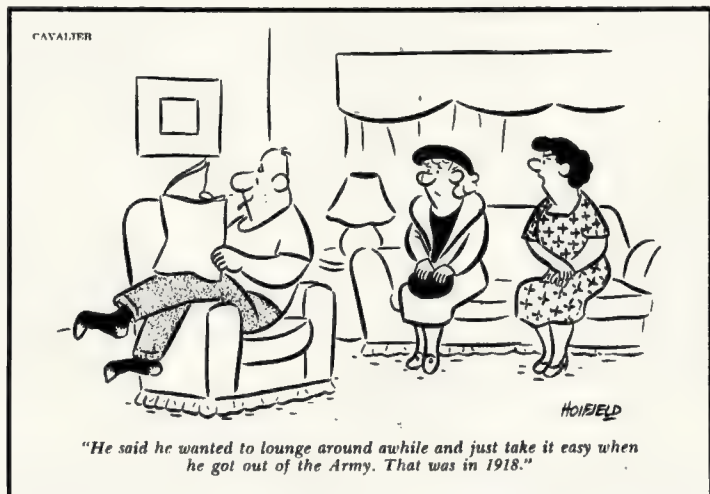
This is what had happened. Nelder, together with Inspector George Murray, had been assigned as part of the saturation tactics to an area out at the beach. They were giving all phone booths the eye on their way out. As they drove along, they noticed a man in one booth. He was half-crouched, and he had the door ajar so that the booth would not be lighted.

Intuitively they stopped. Nelder rushed up and grabbed him so fast that the man did not have time to hang up the phone.

When Nelder put the phone to his ear, he could hear the operator, Claire Moon, saying "One moment please for overtime charges." She was doing her part in trying to keep the man on the line. A prim, middle-aged woman who has spent many years with the phone company, scrupulously doing her routine job, Miss Moon later confessed, "I felt very guilty about asking for overtime charges because the man hadn't yet used up the time he'd paid for."

Nelder asked what number the man was phoning and Miss Moon told him DIAMOND 4-8020.

For a few moments, the man, a large fellow in his forties with a morose, aggrieved face, tried to play the role of the respectable citizen; but this broke down when Nelder found on him a note containing the ransom instructions he was about to transmit to Alfred.



"He said he wanted to lounge around awhile and just take it easy when he got out of the Army. That was in 1918."

"O. K.," he said, "but I can't talk—I'll get killed."

Here the case had reached its most delicate point. If this man could not be persuaded to reveal Leonard's whereabouts quickly, all might be lost.

This passed through Inspector Nelder's mind as they drove toward the Hall of Justice. He had been instructed, during the call he had made to Captain English, to bring in the kidnaper to the Hall right away for questioning, but the more he thought about it the less he liked the idea.

"I got to thinking that it'll probably be a madhouse down at the Hall with everybody there, and this guy'll clam up and that'll be the end of Lennie," Nelder says now. "I thought we'd have a better chance to get something out of him if we questioned him right then and there."

"We didn't exactly break the orders we'd got to bring him into the Hall," Nelder says with a smile, "but I won't deny we drove kind of slow."

He learned that the man's name was Joseph Lear. Then he went to work on him, with the technique most practiced by San Francisco Homicide Inspectors. In this technique the inspector quickly gets on a friendly basis with the suspect, asks the suspect to call him by his first name, and throughout takes the tone of one who is just trying to get at the truth as the most helpful thing he can do for the suspect in this awkward situation.

"You're in it up to your neck, Joe. It's just a kidnaping rap for you now, but if Lennie gets killed you'll go to the gas chamber for sure. I'd sure hate to see that, Joe, wouldn't you?" Nelder said. Within the next fifteen minutes Nelder brought the man around, persuading Lear not only to divulge the address where Leonard was being kept but also to draw a quick sketch of the interior layout of the rooms. It was probably the most persuasive quarter hour's interrogation in Nelder's entire career.

Police inspectors in half a dozen cars met Nelder at a rendezvous near the hideout. About a hundred yards from the house, whose address Lear gave them as 167 Arbor street, they took off their shoes, all except Lear. As they walked down the wet, dark street, only Lear's footsteps echoed in the night.

Lear knocked on the door. A man opened it cautiously, peered out, then tried to slam it closed. Forgetting that he had no shoes on, Inspector Nelder kicked at the door with all his power. He smashed it open but for a week after that limped around with a sore foot. He rushed into the room with his gun drawn, the other inspectors behind him.

There was no resistance. The other kidnaper, who gave his name later as Harold Jackson and was credited with being the planner and strong man of the operation, backed up against the wall, his hands in the air. He was dressed only in a pair of shorts.

"Lennie!" the police shouted. "Lennie!"

After a moment, Leonard Moskowitz, the man on whose behalf the police had

put on their greatest search and the citizens of San Francisco one of their finest examples of cooperative effort, emerged from a closet, looking bewildered, frightened, and very small and childlike amid all the grim men with drawn guns.

"Are you police or gangsters?" Leonard asked timidly.

Aside from a bad cold, he was all right. He had not been harmed, though he had been threatened constantly. Throughout most of the 64 hours of captivity, with the exception of the last two hours, he had been bound to a bed in the upstairs bedroom, his hands and feet held by chains passed through an eight inch length of pipe. A gag had been taped over his mouth and his ears stopped with ear plugs. A saucer had been tied to each knee so that even his slightest movement would be heard.

Leonard told police he had been lured to the house by Jackson, who posed as a real-estate client. Jackson is a good-sized man in his fifties, with wavy brown hair and a seamed face which generally wears a self-assured, contemptuous expression. He is a confident talker and in his double-breasted tweed suit had no difficulty in appearing sufficiently prepossessing to deceive Leonard.

As soon as he got Leonard in the house he shoved him down on a sofa. At the same time Lear came at Leonard with a knife. "One peep out of you, and it's the end," Jackson said coldly to Leonard. "All we want is money and you and your old man are the guys that have it."

Then they hustled him over to a table and Jackson dictated the first ransom note to him, along with a menacing commentary of what would happen to him if he demurred or if his parents failed to comply with the demands.

Leonard did not try to be a hero. Each of the two men outweighed him by about 70 pounds. One held a knife and the other a lead pipe, and they told him they had guns as well and that there were three other men in the gang. "I was petrified," Leonard says.

He pleaded with them but Jackson cut him off. "We've got it all figured out," Jackson said. "We know just what we're doing. It's a calculated risk. If we lose, it's our necks. If we win, we're set."

Though they spoke repeatedly of being part of a gang of five, no others were ever captured and it is established now that Lear and Jackson were the only kidnapers. As I said earlier, kidnaping is not a crime which professional criminals go in for. The police could have made lists of logical or possible suspects from now till doomsday without ever dreaming of Lear or Jackson.

Both Lear and Jackson were former private detectives, Lear as an investigator and Jackson as a partner in the American Patrol Service, which a few years ago employed as many as 100 men. Lear, a man of 43, who had also worked as a farmer, taxi driver and was employed at the time of the kidnaping as a hearing aid salesman, was known to his friends and employers as a person of scrupulous honesty, a man who wouldn't go 30 miles an hour in a 25-mile zone or drop a fishing hook into a stream without

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a license. Jackson had 25 years before been convicted of robbery and served time in San Quentin but had subsequently been pardoned. He had done his time under the name of Hans Anderson, which seems to be his true name. After he got out, he changed not only his name but his fingerprints. The tips of all his fingers have been scarred, apparently by acid, so that the whorls have been obliterated. After World War II he took the money he had made in his detective and patrol agency and put it into a factory manufacturing china figurines and plastic gadgets to protect women's fingernails while their polish was drying. He says he lost \$30,000 in this venture.

Now at last the self-imposed bonds of secrecy could be thrown off, and the newspapers were free to tell the story. They were, of course, all set to go on it, with thousands of words already set up in galleys, and they gave it the full treatment.

During the next few days a number of curious sidelights on the case, some of

them rather amusing, were turned up. Jackson had rented the house on Arbor street a few days before the kidnaping, paying a \$50 deposit and saying his wife would be joining him shortly. "It seemed like a good deal," the owner later told reporters. "No pets or children."

Lear and Jackson went to trial March 23. They offered two surprising defenses. Lear claimed that he had thought Jackson was hiring him for a kind of off-beat private detective job and had not realized it was a kidnaping until the moment the ransom note was being dictated. By that time it was too late for him to back out for fear of his own life, so that he was in effect himself a kidnap victim.

The jury could not give this credence because Lear went in advance with Jackson to purchase the chains and other gear, because he threatened Leonard's life on a number of occasions and had, if he wanted, many opportunities to get away.

Jackson's defense was even more startling. He claimed there had been no kid-

napping at all. Leonard was merely his house guest, he said. They were partners in a hoax designed to extort \$300,000 from Leonard's father which they would share.

It was a mean, insidious kind of defense, with a certain kind of plausibility, based on an appeal to the worst aspects of human nature.

He told this story glibly, but like most liars furnished an over-supply of details to make it convincing. During the six-weeks trial he was exposed in one lie after another until his story fell apart. He and Lear were both found guilty.

California has a "Little Lindbergh" law which states that the death penalty may be imposed as punishment for a kidnaping when ransom has been demanded and when bodily harm has been committed. On June 3, under this law, Jackson was sentenced to death and Lear to life imprisonment without possibility of parole. Their sentences are now under appeal. •



THE HORSE RUNS WILD

Continued from page 37

yards, which wiped out the school record held jointly by "Crazy Legs" Hirsch and Pat Harder, of Detroit Lion fame. His seven touchdowns left him one behind Chuck Hren of Northwestern in the conference touchdown race.

Wisconsin had tied with Purdue for the Big Ten title, but Wisconsin got the bid to the Rose Bowl to play Southern California. This was the country's first look at the amazing Alan Ameche. He gave them a good and exciting picture. The Southern California line did a good job of holding him during the first half. The second half he broke loose, made one 54-yard run and gained a total of 133 yards, coming within 20 yards of equaling the Rose Bowl record set by Bobby Grayson of Stanford.

It wasn't Alan's fault Southern California won 7-0. A fumble after he had set up the tying touchdown with his 54-yard run cost Wisconsin a tie.

But his record breaking playing didn't attract the attention of those who take it on themselves to pick the numerous All-America teams. Ameche was chosen by Movietone and Athletic Publications. The Associated Press, the United Press, and the more authoritative All-America selectors unanimously picked him for the Big Ten first team, but ignored him completely in the All-America selections.

When the two-plateau system was abolished in 1953, the stars of the year before were faced with playing defensive as well as offensive. On the surface the change didn't bother Ameche. He backed up the line and proved almost as effective on defense as on offense.

We asked him how it affected his playing. "I like to play on the defense," he said, "but after I play on the offensive

and defensive I am dead tired at the end of a game. Fatigue is, of course, a dangerous thing to a player. It's then that you get serious injuries. That is what I had to watch, but I guess it didn't change my record very much."

It didn't. His total yardage was cut down to 908 yards, which is still a good record for an ordinary player. The black spot on the 1953 season for Ameche, and also Wisconsin, was the U.C.L.A. game. Again the Bruins held Ameche to a total of 50 yards gained as they won 13-0. The brightest spot for Ameche, and also for Wisconsin was the 34-7 win against Illinois and the famed J. C. Caroline. Alan was a power on defense and carried the ball 17 times for 145 yards, averaging 8.4 on each run. He completely outplayed Caroline whose gains were limited to less than 60 yards.

But when the season was over and the All-America experts got busy, Alan fared little better than he had the year before. Look Magazine, the National All-Scholastic (based on classroom averages as well as gridiron prowess), the Gridiron Record, and the Extension magazine picked him on their All-America teams. But the United Press, the International News, the Chicago Tribune poll all placed him on their second All-America teams, while the Associated Press selected him for the third team. He wasn't mentioned on the other All-America selections.

Some of football's best brains didn't think much of these oversights. Paddy Driscoll of the Bears said, "Alan Ameche is the only football player I have seen since Red Grange who could have stepped out of high school and played pro football. As far as these All-America

football selections are concerned, so many elements enter in the selection not connected with real football playing that they often don't make much sense. Alan Ameche is the greatest fullback on any college gridiron today and I say that without hesitation."

Coach Red Sanders of U.C.L.A., whose line was the only one to hold Ameche in check, said this about Alan's playing: "He is the strongest runner in all football history, not even excepting Bronko Nagurski. You'll read a lot about Ameche in the years to come. He will become something of a legend. He is so good that a lot of people today don't realize what they see."

Failure to get All-America recognition doesn't worry Alan. He is a quiet and modest youth who sometimes doubts if he is as good as some say.

In 1952 Alan married his high school sweetheart, Yvonne Molinaro. They have a son, Brian. He is called "The Pony" by the students and, thanks to his eating habits, is almost as famous as his father.

Alan had some troubles with his studies as a freshman, but he quickly overcame this and in his junior year he was a B student. Every pro football team in the country is after him with tempting offers. "I'll play pro football for several years," Alan told us, "and then I'll try my hand at coaching. If I am a good coach, I'll make that my life work. If not, I'll go into business for myself."

Alan was quick to add, "That isn't what I am thinking about now. This year we won't lose the conference title by the skin of our teeth, like we did last year. It's my last year and I think I am stronger and better than I have ever been. So is the Wisconsin team."

Now all that needs improvement is the eyesight of the All-America selectors. Around Madison, Wisconsin, the fans aren't too worried about that phase. They're confident that when nominations for All-America fullback start this November, the selectors will rise as a unit and yell, "The Horse! The Horse! The Horse!" •



TRIAL BY ICE

Continued from page 27

paid no attention. He cursed them. He ordered them to get up. They refused.

Tilton hoisted each man back onto his feet, shook him, and slapped his face. They stayed up. He started on again, pulling them after him on the line. Again one of them fell, yanking the other down. But this time both got back on their feet and kept plodding after the hunched figure dimly ahead of them in the swirling snow. For another mile they straggled along after him, until finally Tilton fell. He tried to get up. He could not.

Then he realized what he had stumbled over. It was a snow tunnel, leading to the door of a house. They were in Point Hope.

All three men slithered through the tunnel, where they bumped into a sleeping dog. Tilton's pounding and the dog's howling promptly brought a man to the door. He opened it, looked down at the three figures hulking there on hands and knees, jumped back a step, and exclaimed, "For God's sake, where did you come from?"

Weaving, but back on his nearly frozen feet, Tilton told him. The man couldn't believe it. He led Tilton to a chair and got him some coffee and hardtack. After some argument the weary whaleman convinced him. The Eskimos had long since stretched out just inside the door and gone fast asleep.

Tilton's host, he recalled, was a Norwegian named Anderson, and he ran a trading post at the settlement. He nursed Tilton, who had a frostbitten toe, and the two guides, who had frostbitten ears and feet. After a few days, with a sled, team, and two guides loaned him by Anderson, Tilton went in search of the dogs he had had to leave behind. They were still where he had left them, still alive—all but one. They found its remains on the way back; it had been blown off a seventy-five-foot cliff.

Point Hope marked less than a third of Tilton's odyssey. But it took him nine days to recover from his frostbitten toe, repair his damaged equipment, and prepare to push on. Here his two guides quit; their frostbite was much more serious, and they had had enough. Tilton was able to find two more Eskimos, a man and wife named Tickey and Canvanar. "Tickey was a good man," Tilton used to say, "and his wife was twice the man that he was."

It was the twenty-ninth of November, more than a month from the time he had first set out from the frozen-in fleet, when Tilton and his new guides started off again.

By December thirteenth Tilton had reached another village. Of the sixteen dogs he had started with two weeks before only nine were left. Nevertheless, when he found he could buy another sled at this village, he got it, dividing the load and the dogs.

Then they were hit by another blizzard, a howling, freezing storm that pinned them down and almost froze them all. But it cleared. They kept on the move again, south again.

It was Christmas Day when they reached the Buckland River. Tilton took a few hours off that day, and the three travelers squatted down to a Christmas dinner they had saved for the occasion. With unaccustomed splendor they dined on pork and beans, fried fish, fried bacon, bread, and a tin of preserved California grapes. Tilton had coffee; Tickey and Canvanar preferred tea.

Along the river the going was better; they made thirty miles a day. But when they crossed over and struck across country, they met trouble again. The snow was so impassable that they had to break the trail for the dogs, and the weather was so cold that when the work exhausted them they could not ride on the sleds; the sweat inside their heavy clothing would have frozen if they had not kept moving. The food began to give out. It got so low that they barely had enough for themselves. When two of the dogs weakened, Tilton had to kill them to feed the others. But finally, near dusk on December 28, two months from the time he had left the trapped whalers, Tilton reached the farther side of Norton Sound.

He had completed nearly half of his trek.

It was an easier journey on down to Unalakleet and then to St. Michael. But at St. Michael Tilton discovered that he had lost a day in his reckoning; although he had thought it was January 6, it was January 7. And he and his Eskimos were nearly at the end of their endurance. Canvanar was sick, and Tickey was sick out of sympathy for his wife. It took twelve days for them to recover. But Tilton could not give up; he rested, nursed his two Eskimos back to health, bought another sled and team. Then he set out again.

His plan was to strike for the Yukon River and follow it up to Dawson. But when he reached the big river he found three steamers, frozen in. This meant that provisions for the winter were getting to Dawson only on sleds and men's backs; there would be nothing to spare for three hungry travelers. He changed his course and cut across country.

It was 57 degrees below zero—"no weather for haying," he used to say—when he set out to climb the towering mountains of the Alaska Range. It took him five days to fight his way to them, and four days of hunting, exploring, and backtracking before he could find a pass. The cut was twenty miles long, but it took them three days to get through.

Then they set out across the high tableland, making good time. When they

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struck a big lake, Tilton promptly piled everything, dogs included, aboard the sleds and hoisted sail. Hauling in and paying out the sheets before the blustery wind, they sped across the lake. There they found a tiny Eskimo settlement.

Of the twenty-nine dogs Tilton had had at St. Michael eighteen were left. So he traded one of the sleds for more food, and struck out again. His destination this time: the Gulf of Alaska and the Pacific Ocean.

It took him twenty-one days, three weeks during which blizzards battered the straggling little train every other day. The storms alternated with warm spells that turned their path to ice pudding. But when they had waded hip-deep through the last tumbling river, they were at Katmai, on the south coast. Before them lay the waters of Shelikof Strait; rolling down to the Pacific.

Across the strait was Kodiak Island, and on the island, Tilton knew, were a number of villages. But how to get across the strait?

There was a small Eskimo village, but no one there knew where he could find anything big enough to take three people across the strait. Tilton poked along the deserted shore until he found an abandoned dory. It was so leaky, he recalled later, that it "wouldn't hold pumpkins. Her seams had opened so that when I looked at it I felt that a man would fall through if he wasn't too beamy." But it would have to do.

It was the longest row he ever had, though. He started at dawn, kept the oars

digging all morning, past noon, while Canvanar spooned food and water into his mouth, and all afternoon. His shoulders quivered with the pain, his gulping breath seared his throat, and where blisters had formed and broken on his hands, smears of blood made the oars slip in his grasp. Tickey and Canvanar spelled each other at the bailer; with the sea sloshing in at nearly every dip of the dory and streams trickling through the makeshift caulking they could never relax. It was two hours before sunset when they finally nudged ground on Kodiak Island. They limped out on the beach, wrestled the dory above the high-water line and set up camp. At dusk Tilton stood studying the expanse of water he had just crossed. He had made it with not much time to spare. Now the powerful tide was racing out, a wind had sprung up against it, and the boiling, angry sea was a frightening sight.

For the next four days Tilton and his two guides rowed along the coast of Kodiak Island, poking into each sheltered bay, looking for a town. Every hour or so they pulled onshore to dump out the water that had begun to fill the dory despite their constant bailing. Tilton was back in his element. But this ceaseless rowing and fighting to keep the leaky old boat from sinking under them was beginning to wear him down. Tickey and Canvanar, who had been stolidly uncomplaining no matter what the hardship or danger, finally began to mutter to each other. But Tilton kept the oars creaking steadily. He knew that sooner

or later they would find an inhabited town, and transportation to the States.

He found his town on March 22, 1898. He had traveled 1200 miles, by foot, sled, and ice floe; he had been on his way five months. Now he came into St. Pauls Harbor, Kodiak Island, where there was a whaling station of the Alaska Commercial Co. More important, a schooner rode at anchor in the harbor.

Tilton found the schooner's owner. His name was Herron, as Tilton remembered it, and he ran the whaling station. Yes, Herron was sure that only 200 miles across the gulf, in Prince William Sound, Tilton could make contact with one of the many steamers running prospectors up to Anchorage and the gold fields of the Yukon. Herron would charter his schooner, with captain, to Tilton so he could get across the Gulf. But the price would be \$7000.

Tilton argued a bit, but it was obvious that the owner of the schooner knew he had the whaleman where he wanted him. Tilton thought back over his long trek, of the white traders who had given him provisions, equipment, and dogs, of the Eskimos who had dipped into their dwindling supplies to give him food. "I hadn't realized until then," he used to tell the tourists on the *Morgan*, "that I had reached civilization."

With no alternative he chartered the schooner and signed a contract that pledged the owner of the *Belvedere* to pay the \$7000, knowing full well that Mr. Herron would have his well-deserved troubles trying to collect. Tickey and Canvanar did not look with favor on the prospect of an open-water voyage after that trip across the strait; but they stuck by Tilton and reluctantly climbed aboard.

Tilton had thought that this last leg of his journey would be a simple one. But he was mistaken. They were not six hours out when the schooner rocked over under a northwest gale. It was strong enough to "blow the hair off a dog," he used to say, and they could not carry sail in it. They ran before it until it blew itself out. But then the schooner's captain turned out to be no navigator. They were out of sight of land, and the captain had no idea where they were. Tilton took over and, by following the stars and dead reckoning, got them back on course for Prince William Sound. Their first landfall was barely in sight when the next gale hit them. Tilton had had enough; refusing to turn and run before it again, he reefed the schooner down and fought through the deck-smashing seas to the nearest sheltered harbor.

Here his good luck returned. The gasoline schooner *Albion* had put in to the same harbor for shelter and had gone aground. But the next tide floated her. And she was bound for Portland, Oregon.

Still followed by faithful Tickey and Canvanar, Tilton shipped south aboard the *Albion*. When the gasoline schooner chugged into Portland, none of his equipment was left. His provisions, his sleds, his dogs were gone. All he had now were the Eskimo couple and fifty cents in his pocket. Behind him lay 1700 miles of

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blizzards, rotting ice, starvation, frostbite, and gales at sea. It had taken him five and one-half months. But he had made it.

Yet his odyssey had been in vain.

There had been no way he could have forseen it, but the U. S. Revenue Cutter Service had gone to the rescue of the trapped whalers. While Tilton was fighting his way south, three men of the Revenue Cutter Service were going north/also overland. Their plan was to push up the coast to Cape Prince of Wales, just below the Arctic Circle. There they would round up some of the Cape's famous reindeer herds, then drive them the rest of the way up the coast to Point Lay to provide the needed extra rations. The plan succeeded, and since one of the men on the rescue expedition was a doctor, the sick and scurvy-ridden were treated as well. The stranded whalers were helped too by the loyal Eskimos who worked for Charles Brower at his weather station. Despite the winter storms they went off into the frozen wilderness and returned with enough reindeer to keep the whalers fairly well provided for until the rescue expedition arrived. It turned out to be one of the best reindeer-hunting seasons in years. By midsummer the last whaler was free from the ice and headed south.

But meanwhile there was George Fred Tilton in Portland, Oregon, broke, unknown, and with two homesick Eskimos on his hands. He wired the *Belvedere's* owner in Boston, William J. Lewis, to announce his arrival, tell the plight of the whalers, and ask for money. Back came a telegram to the effect that this man must be an imposter. No one could have made such a trek. If indeed this was Tilton, Lewis wired, he had obviously deserted the *Belvedere* before she went north a year ago.

Tilton was not stumped yet. Years before, he had left the sum of \$450 with a ship chandler in San Francisco, as a "little sheet anchor to windward." Now he wired for the money, got it, and boarded the next steamer for San Francisco. The *Belvedere's* owner had agents there; Tilton was sure he could convince them and get a relief expedition headed north, even though help could not reach Point Lay now until the end of June.

Tilton was beginning to have his troubles with Tickey and Canvanar. They had never seen anything remotely like Portland, and they were popeyed from morning to night. By the time the three boarded the steamer, Tilton was so tired of answering questions that he had to lock himself in his stateroom, "to keep from being talked to death."

He did not know it until later, but on April 17, 1898, the same day his fantastic journey finally came to an end in San Francisco, the Revenue Cutter Service expedition was beating its way into Point Lay, with fresh reindeer and medicines and new hope for the whalers who had sat out the long winter north of the Arctic Circle.

Tilton found the agents for the *Belvedere's* owner easier to convince. It was obviously Tilton who stomped into their office; he showed the effects of his long trek; and he had the Eskimos to prove his story. The agents immediately equipped a merchant ship with supplies and sent it racing north. Then they wired William Lewis. The answer was delayed a bit, but when it came, Mr. Lewis authorized the agents to give Tilton \$100, in exchange for an I.O.U. "Pretty generous, wasn't he?" Tilton used to say. With the \$100 he sent his faithful Eskimo guides back home by ship. The spectacle of San Francisco had more than surprised them; it had scared the daylight-out of them. They were glad to be on their way back to the little trading post at Point Hope.

Years later, as shipkeeper and skipper of the grounded *Charles W. Morgan*, Captain Fred used to give his account of this spectacular odyssey, pause, light a match to his pipe, and then recall one more little thing. He had, he said, received a letter from Mr. Lewis. The owner asked him to go back north and rejoin his ship that spring.

Tilton puffed at his pipe, disappeared behind the cloud of smoke, and flicked out the match. "He didn't say how I was to get there," he remarked. "So I wrote and asked him if he wanted me to walk back."

Another cloud of smoke, as he leaned back against the *Morgan's* mainmast. "But," he said, "I didn't get any answer." •

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WE TUNNELED A HELL HOLE

Continued from page 30

directly into the box. Instantly the needle on the meter swung around sharply and stopped dead on the red zone. Highly explosive!

"What in the world!" Agnew exclaimed.

He pressed the reset button and worked the bulb again. At that instant his world exploded in his face.

A huge puff of flame burst through the heading, followed by a concussion that

hurled men to the ground with clothes and flesh burning. Smoke swirled wildly in the brisk draft and then the stink of burning rubber arose as a conveyor belt caught fire.

On the way out with a train of muck, a dinky-driver saw and heard the blast. He attempted to return, but the smoke drove him back. At the airlock he tried to contact the heading but the phone was down.

On the surface the quiet of the night office was shattered by the news. The alarm was rapidly spread. Thirty men were believed trapped. Expert sandhogs and safety men were called out of their beds. The Fire Department issued a special order dispatching most of the city's inhalator squads. Receiving Hospital was told to be prepared to handle a disaster. On the street around the job a line of ambulances began to form.

Our Safety Office was equipped with modern 50-pound oxygen breathing masks and Superintendent Frank Kopus quickly prepared to lead a squad of experienced men in the first rescue try. (Most of us go through a refresher course with these masks on every job under direction of Bureau of Mines' experts and know how to use them.)

Kopus urged city firemen to hold back, knowing they were unfamiliar with compressed air and tunnel conditions. When his squad reached the airlock, they found the painfully burned Ace leading his gang through the decompression chamber. While a portion of the rescue squad assisted the injured men, Kopus led the rest into the heading where they extinguished several small fires and opened all ventilation lines.

Ace and a dozen others were hospitalized. Jack Agnew, badly burned about the face and chest, died a few hours later. Detroit's Mayor Cobo, who sat at his bedside throughout the night, said Agnew would have been blind if he lived.

Ace told me later how the whole crew, ignoring the danger of further explosions, stuck together to help the seriously-injured men. The trip out had been a long and painful one.

For many weeks afterward we debated the actual cause of the explosion. Some sandhogs thought it was "flashback" from the electronic explosivimeter. Frankly, we were more puzzled by the fact that only one man was killed.

I've never seen such radical safety measures as were put into effect to avoid further blasts. Clusters of holes, hundreds in all, were drilled along the tunnel route to "air out" possible gas pockets. Six-inch pipes inserted into many of these holes would also act as blowlines. In the tunnel every light bulb was covered with a marine-type shield. Wiring and electrical appliances were sprayed with a plastic coating. Hand tools like wrenches, shovels, air spade blades were now made of a sparkproof alloy containing brass. Costs on these were terrific; the soft metal stood no wear. Finally an expensive and highly-complicated gas detector was installed in each heading which would sound a klaxon horn warning in the presence of explosive gas or carbon monoxide. I've seen these operate and they are a tunnelman's dream.

We resumed work after a week but the explosion seemed to have left behind a residue of tension and pessimism. Sandhogs were nervous as they worked and cursed quickly. By now we all had the same feeling—"This is another hell hole."

Even the ground seemed to have turned against us. One day the shield might be shoving nicely through good blue clay, and the next day hardpan would be there for the miners' air spades.

About once a week a boulder lodged against the shield's cutting edge and it would have to be excavated and broken up with a few sticks of dynamite.

Finally veins of sand and water began to show and compressed air leaked through these to the surface. Home owners descended on our office to complain that little geysers of sand appeared and disappeared among their lawns and driveways. We stationed observers on the street above the shields to keep an around-the-clock vigil for air leaks. These were sealed from the tunnel by blowing wet grout through the ground at high pressure before they could grow into something more dangerous.

However, one leak expanded quickly into a blow—one so serious that for a few tense minutes the sandhogs fighting it were in danger of being drawn into its fury and blown skyward. It happened late one day after a change of shifts. In the powerhouse pressure gauges began to drop from 28 pounds to 27, then to 26. At 25 a mercurial switch tripped a relay and a signal bell began to clang its warning.

Then both office phones were ringing. "Whole damn works is blowing out here!" reported the north observer.

On the tunnel phone a breathless heading boss yelled, "We're losing all our air!" It was a grim statement; their compressed air was the one mighty force separating these sandhogs from gas, flood and cavein.

Superintendent Kopus had the phone. "Stay with it," he ordered. "Shoot your pea gravel. We'll work from top."

To the powerhouse he sent an order for more compressed air: "Give them all the wind you can make!"

We found the air leak alongside railroad tracks on Outer Drive near Seven Mile road. Fire trucks and a police car were already on the scene, summoned by terrified neighbors. A crowd of bewildered spectators was gathered at a respectable distance, some of them mumbling that an oil gusher was surely about to come in.

From a hole three feet in diameter, I saw pressure vomit sand and clay 100 feet into the air with a roar like a locomotive's open steam valves. As we watched, pieces of lumber and maple-heart blocks showered the street. A safety hard hat came down with something attached to it. It was not part of a man—only a half-filled sandbag. From the debris, we knew sandhogs in the tunnel were tossing everything portable into the leak to plug it up. But in doing so they exposed themselves to the danger of being swept up like chips into a vacuum cleaner.

With pea gravel and mud lashing at his windshield, Operator Tom Turkett quickly maneuvered his motorcrane into position and raised his boom. He had to work blind, without a signalman, feeling for his target through the cloud of whirling dust by dragging a key-block back and forth. He still managed to lay the block into the opening in good time.

The roaring noise of the air leak changed to a high-pitched squeal as the block plunged downward and lodged somewhere in the earth, narrowing the

passage of air. A second block followed the first, another. Then truckloads of clay from the shaft were spread over the area. Finally, by phone, Kopus directed the tunnel crew to shoot tons of wet grout into the void, where it would spread out and harden into a tight seal. The worst was over and the tunnel was saved.

In the south heading water still poured in to bedevil the hard-working sandhogs. They were now encased in rubber—rubber boots, trousers, coat, gloves. Even their hard hats wore a rubber drain to direct water away from the neck and face. And still they got soaked to the skin. Progress was slow. Sometimes they didn't make a 30-inch shove in eight hours. Air pressure had again been raised, this time to 35 pounds, and it was only the extra pressure that kept the tunnel from washing out completely.

We were alarmed at the rise in bends' cases, 12 or 15 a day, some of them more severe than we had ever before witnessed, or endured. Men were doubled up with pain, even rendered unconscious, on the street, in theaters, busses, bars. Any part of the body might be afflicted. Pains were sharp, like the tearing of a dull knife through muscles of the legs or arms, the chest or shoulders, even the stomach. And sometimes the groin—. In the head it became the staggers, beginning with dizziness, loss of balance, and finally unconsciousness.

Few regular workers escaped the bends in one form or another. Superintendent Frank Kopus, a man of superb physical condition and one-time boxing heavyweight, was afflicted as often as anybody. And so far as doctors were concerned, slow decompression in the medical air lock, now as it was 75 years ago, is still the only cure. Several medicines were offered to relieve the after-pains and itch but these were scorned. Over the years we have found there is only one effective medicine—good bourbon whisky in generous doses. It actually worked. It relieved pain, reduced chills, stimulated and improved circulation. Even Kopus, who neither drank nor smoked, soon learned to draw his pint of whisky from the job's guarded store of "bend medicine" before entering the lock for the long and painful ordeal of compression and decompression.

Usual safeguards and precautions had been taken to protect men from the bends, and as the pressure in the tunnel was increased from time to time, so too were these safeguards. Whole crews were broken up into smaller ones and the shifts staggered. Each group worked one hour, came out into free air for four hours rest, went back for another hour and were paid for eight. (Sandhogs average \$140 a week.) Time spent in the air lock and in travel—the heading was a mile and a half away now—accounted for the other 2 hours.

When a shift returned to the air lock to decompress, the men were wet, tired and cranky. As the lock pressure lowered, air condensed into a wet soupy fog until a man was almost breathing water. Simultaneously the temperature dropped about 40 to 50 degrees—condensation is the basic theory of refrigeration. Then

the "sandhogs' symphony," as we called it, began—everybody hacking and coughing at once. It was no wonder they had a "Let's get to hell outa here!" attitude and decompressed too rapidly for safety.

Electrical Engineer Howard Ball solved this problem to everybody's comfort when he installed a system of 30 1,000-watt heat lamps in the lock to disperse dampness and cold. And outside of the lock he rigged up a recording graph that made a permanent record of decompression time for each crew and exposed violators.

Big restaurant-sized coffee-makers perked 24 hours a day in the hoghause where sandhogs could relax and enjoy their four-hour breaks. Army cots were set up for those who wanted to sleep and each man was issued a blanket and a thin mattress. When the light cots began to collapse under the weight of some of these Goliaths, bunks were constructed from mapleheart timbers and bolted to the floor. These conveniences, nevertheless, were no concession to a union official's whim, but time-proven necessities for a tough breed of men whose back-breaking labor in dangerous conditions tended to fray nerves and drain quantities of vitality from the best of them.

Long after the north heading was completed, Felix Francis, veteran of North Dakota's 38-foot Garrison Dam tunnels and dozens of others, took charge in the south. Conditions there had become almost unbearable. Sometimes a whole week went by without a single foot of

progress. The ground was all quicksand and water now, and the shield was stopped cold. No shield will push through unyielding sand.

Sandhogs slowly worked their way through the pockets removing a shovelful of muck at a time. Dozens of well-points, like huge needles, were pushed far into the ground at every angle. Connected to a suction line, the well-points drew thousands of gallons of water from the ground. It was hardly enough.

When a few feet of ground had been mined out and the walls carefully cribbed with timbers, an attempt was made to shove the shield. Sometimes the necessary 30 inches were completed and another ring of blocks erected. Often as not, the whole works collapsed and tons of sand and water poured down to fill the void and jam against the bulkhead pockets without an inch gained. Then there was nothing to do but dig it out again and repeat the process.

Felix Francis told me one day: "Only way this hell hole tunnel will be finished is the old way—with muscles and banjos."

And that's the way it was done. One night in June sand began to slide and the concrete bulkhead separating this tunnel from another stood suddenly revealed. Heading Boss Bill Houston stood up inside the shield. "Been waiting a long time to see you all," he drawled, and spat a stream of tobacco juice down its nice clean white front. But there was no party this time to celebrate its finish. We never celebrate a "hell hole"—except maybe with a private prayer. •



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BEWARE THE SHYSTER CAR DEALER

Continued from page 11

and smug about this very nice windfall.

There's just one little catch which he didn't notice. That \$2,500 Floovey he bought is worth, everything included, just \$2,000. There's no ceiling on car prices and the genial Floovey boys have simply jacked the price up to cover the extra-large allowance which sucked in Mr. A. Actually, he got \$50 less than he had been offered by other dealers.

To get the facts on the busher racket I answered an ad in the newspaper of a nearby town that said, "Wanted: An automobile salesman, the kind of man who is accustomed to making \$10,000 a year. No experience necessary."

I knew that this agency was using the busher racket with great success. I called and was given an appointment with the sales manager. I told him that I had sold cars, but he waved this aside and told me that, under their system, experience was more of a liability than an asset. He quickly got down to the facts of life among the bushers.

He showed me a large package of cards, half for insertion in windshields, half for mailing. A message was mimeographed on all of them. "Would you take

— for your — in trade on a new (here the name of the car sold by the dealer)" This plus the dealer's name and address and a place for my own signature. I was to fill in the blanks, doing them on the spot in the case of the windshield cards, working from a purchased local registration list in the case of the postcards. I was told that I should distribute at least 500 cards a week. The sales manager suggested that I get local school girls to fill out the postcards.

A portion of each day I was to spend in the showroom, taking care of the prospects who answered my cards, but I was told by the manager that I shouldn't "spend more than twenty minutes with any prospect. If he needs more time than that he's just shopping. He's not ready to drop and you'll make more money by brushing him off and getting out more cards." He added, "Skip demonstrations, they only slow up the system and it's volume we want here. Remember, if the offer you make him on the card doesn't nail him you lose time and money bothering with him." I was to be paid, incidentally, in commissions, only.

Then the sales manager tossed the

real clincher which puts the dealer in the clear and puts the salesman on the spot. "You can offer the prospect any allowance you like," he said, almost as an afterthought, "but remember, anything we pay him above our own appraiser's figure comes out of your commission. And you might keep in mind that we have a mighty tough appraiser."

Just to show me that this little complication needn't interfere with my making my \$10,000, he went on quickly to explain that there were several time-tested ways in which I could make my offers high enough to pull people in, yet cover myself on the appraiser's price.

He outlined the price-packing routine, but warned me that if it is pushed too far it backfires and frightens the prospect off. He recommended what he called the "Christmas tree" system. (In the car trade a Christmas tree is a high-priced car loaded with accessories and extras.)

In this variation the salesman greets you with deference, almost reverence. "I have your new car waiting for you," he croons. He steers you away from that two-door economy model you had in mind and blinds you with the biggest, plushiest job in the company's line. It's got three of everything and lists at \$4,200.

You smile oafishly at being caught with your wallet showing, but you tell him that, with the \$900 he offered you for your Chevrolet you could just about manage that \$2,400 coupe. His face grows a bit grave. He purses his lips and frowns. "Gosh, I want you to have the car that pleases you (there's a slight implication here that you're not quite the man he thought you were) but I'm afraid we couldn't allow you quite as much on your old car against the coupe."

"O.K. How much?" you ask him.

He gets confidential. "You see, it would be different if you didn't have a Chevrolet to turn in. We're so heavily overstocked on Chevs right now that we've been ordered not to take any more in (by a coincidence dealers using the bushier racket are never taking Chevrolts—or whatever car you happen to bring in), but we were willing to take yours on the super deluxe custom because we felt that that was your kind of car and we wanted to adjust the price to your advantage. On the coupe—well, I think I might be able to make an excep-

tion and take your Chev after all, just to help you out. I might be able to persuade our buyer to give you—oh, say \$300."

Of course, if you took the \$4,200 model they'd give you the \$900 allowance cheerfully. They sell about two of these jobs a year and if you approached them without a trade, they'd probably knock nearly that much off the price outright, just to get rid of the white elephant.

The sales manager told me, with a great deal of relish, of another gambit which is highly successful. He called it the "Crank Buyer" angle.

This time the prospect gets his card through the mail. It's hastily hand written. "I have a buyer for your 1951 Ford and can offer you sixteen hundred in trade on a new Floovey if you contact me at once." It's signed by a salesman we'll call Frank Smith.

When the prospect brings in the card, Frank looks at it and gets excited. "Where have you been? I've been trying to reach you on the phone. This buyer I have for your car is an impatient guy and we can't afford to let him get away. You see, he's elderly and eccentric and the only car he'll consider is a fifty-one Ford. Seems his own was wrecked. It was a present from his dead wife and he was so attached to it that he wants to replace it exactly. Your car is just the right model and color (if the prospect asked Frank, right here, what model and color his car is, Frank would head for the showers). Just make yourself comfortable in this new car while I call him and tell him I have your car."

Frank comes back the picture of disappointment and frustration.

"That crumb promised me he'd wait until I called him. Now he says he's found a car and bought it. If you'd only gotten here a little earlier! But look, I feel awful about this. I almost feel as though it was my fault." He ponders for a moment, then brightens. He lowers his voice. "Look, I'm supposed to be delivering a new car, but I want to take care of you first. It's almost impossible to get rid of a '51 Ford right now, but there's a chance, just a chance, mind you, that I know a party who'll take your car."

By the time Frank comes back his victim is pretty low in his mind. He's sold himself on a new car, but now it

looks as though he won't be able to get rid of his old one.

When Frank comes back, his smile is burning like a pure white flame. "Oh, you lucky, lucky guy!" he says. "I had to do some fast talking, but my party went for your car!"

The customer's feelings are mixed with relief at being able to sell his car and gratitude toward Frank for going to bat for him this way. He's ripe.

Just a second. Frank's big, boyish grin flickers a bit, then he slips in his little announcement. "Of course I couldn't get quite the price our original party was willing to pay, but we were so lucky to find another buyer that I knew you'd want me to grab it. I got you seven hundred for it!"

It may seem incredible that people fall for such amateur theatricals. Yet, the sales manager told me that since introducing this system, his firm had passed its biggest competitor in sales for the first time in over 20 years. He admitted that a lot of people got mad when the trap was sprung, but quickly added, "Look at it this way. There are forty thousand car owners registered in this area. We try to contact all of them at least once a year. If we sell only one per cent of them that means we sell four hundred cars a year. We're doing it, too, and we never used to sell more than two hundred and fifty cars yearly."

The card in the windshield isn't the only selling dodge being used by unscrupulous dealers. Misleading newspaper and radio advertising is being widely used to lure prospects into the showroom.

Let's say you have a 1950 Plymouth and you'd like to trade it in on a new car. You visit several dealers, but the biggest offer is \$500. Then you remember that one local dealer has been advertising sensationally-high allowances. You drive over and let a salesman look at your car.

He tells you that he thinks it's worth about \$800. Wow! In no time at all you've picked out your new car and are ready to sign the papers. At this point the salesman says that he has to get the boss's O.K. Just a matter of form, of course.

The boss comes back with him and he's biting the end of his cigar off with rage. He shouts that such an allowance is impossible. The salesman points out that he's already promised you \$800. The boss



pounds the desk and says that they already have so many Plymouths that they are only paying \$300 for clean 51's. Finally, after nearly coming to blows, they reach a compromise, say \$450. Often the customer is so impressed by this venerable burlesque skit that he accepts, forgetting, in the noise and confusion, that he's getting less than he was offered by legitimate dealers. Besides, he can't let the salesman down after the way he stood up and fought for him, can he?

I've already mentioned the packed price as a quick, easy way of covering high allowances and generally brightening up the books. Here's the reason why such a thing is possible.

First of all, there is no such thing as a fixed price on an automobile. You may have noticed that car ads rarely give any price at all. When they do mention price it's in only the vaguest terms, usually something like this:

"You can have a new Floovey for as little as \$1,697*!" Looks good, doesn't it? Well, let's see if we can track down that asterisk. Far down in the ad, buried deep and printed in type designed by the guy who engraves the Lord's Prayer on the head of a pin, is an explanatory note. "Price of Tycoon Sedanette at factory. Special equipment and state and local taxes, if any, extra." The Tycoon Sedanette, by the way, is the business coupe.

You'll find, when you get around to signing the contract, that taxes and special equipment aren't the only extras. Some of them are legitimate, of course, such as freight. This is usually about \$70 if you live more than a few hundred miles from Detroit, even though your car may have been assembled in your own city. Then there's \$20 to \$40 for the dealer's handling charge (most new cars are delivered with enough finger-prints on the paint to justify this item).

At this time of the year, when the new models are appearing, many dealers are offering bargains on current models still on hand. Make sure you really get a bargain. Some dealers will advertise these cars as "new cars," then fail to give a new car guarantee with them. Always get a full guarantee with such a car, one that covers 90 days or 4,000 miles, whichever comes first. Also, the price of these cars should be substantially reduced, at least 20 per cent in most cases. Remember, the average car depreciates from one third to one half in the first year and it's only reasonable to expect the dealer to take part of the initial loss.

It all adds up to an unsavory picture of the automobile business, but it isn't entirely the dealer's fault. After all, to keep his franchise he must dispose of his share of his factory's output, whether the public is buying or not. The factories, which seem but little influenced by buying trends, continue to roll cars off the line just as fast as possible, whether the dealer can dispose of them or not. Then, as the dealer's stock of cars piles up, he must devise a constant succession of selling campaigns and stunts to keep them moving. Small wonder that sharp practices inevitably appear when the market is slow as it has been for the last year.

The factories could curb many of the rackets and swindles by cutting back pro-

duction to a point where it was more in step with public demand. They could stamp out price-packing, too, by frankly advertising the prices of their cars, delivered locally.

It isn't likely that this will happen in the near future. In the meanwhile, it is up to the buyer to protect himself. The best way for him to do this is by observing a few basic rules of car-buying.

1. When you decide to turn in your car on a new one, find out for yourself just what its turn-in value is. You can do this easily by watching the classified ads for a short time, noting prices on makes, models and year similar to your car. Once you have learned the price range in which your car falls, you can ignore fantastically high offers, whether by card, ad, or radio. They are nothing but come-ons.

2. Don't turn in your car until you have had it appraised by not one, but several, dealers. Then, when you finally pick the make you intend to buy, visit at least two dealers in that make. Here's where you'll discover that there is no such thing as a fixed price in the car business.

3. Don't buy any car without receiving first an itemized accounting of all costs.

4. Don't ever sign a contract in blank, the blanks to be filled in later. Read what you sign and get a copy before you leave.

5. Don't agree to any financing plan until you have compared its terms with those offered by your local bank. You may save enough to pay for the radio and heater on your new car.

6. Insist on an itemized statement of the financing charges. This should include: The cash price of the car, delivered to you and including any and all extras; the exact amount allowed on your old car; the amount of the financing charge; just how much your monthly payment will be and how many months the payments will run.

7. If your financing includes insurance, get a detailed description of the exact type and the amount of coverage before you sign up. Demand a policy or at least a written contract stating the particulars of the insurance. Otherwise, you may find later that you don't actually have the protection you paid for.

8. Never buy any car on your first visit to the dealer. Always take your time. If the dealer shows any sign of trying to stampee or high-pressure you, go elsewhere. Nine out of 10 times such tactics indicate that he's anxious to keep you off balance, thus paving the way for tricks.

9. Don't buy a car from any dealer who treats you discourteously or with even the faintest trace of dishonesty. If he'll do this when you are buying a car, imagine how he'll treat you when you must depend on him for service.

10. Last, and most important, buy that new car from a dealer you know personally, the long-time resident of your community who plans to stay in business. This man will treat you fairly because he wants to sell you a car whenever you buy a new one. Too, he expects to deal with you on service, and he wants to please you. He can only do this by giving you square deals. •

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AMERICA'S FIGHTINGEST PRIVATE

Continued from page 8

immensely proud of the fact he was a Jew.

Damon Runyon wrote a famous poem to Sammie. Marshal Foch had words of praise for him. And General Pershing called him the bravest of the brave. Few know the beginning of the Sammie Dreben legend. I am probably qualified to tell about it; I had an important part in that beginning.

In late May 1910, I was in the Canal Zone recruiting Americans for my machine-gun squads. We were to fight in the army being formed by Juan Estrada, governor of Bluefields, Nicaragua, who aspired to overthrow the government of President Madriz. The Canal Zone was a haven for cutthroats and fugitives from justice in the States. My experience with these so-called bad men as soldiers had never been good—they would doublecross you eagerly if the other side paid them enough—but I was obliged to take a number of them.

President Madriz's spies were everywhere in the Canal Zone. They knew I was there, and why I was there. While they weren't averse to outright assassination, they usually worked in more subtle ways because of the alert and efficient Canal Zone police. One of the favorite tricks of these spies was to start a brawl in a *cantina* and do their killing under the cover of a free-for-all fight.

I managed to recruit about 50 men. There were some I didn't trust, but, on the whole, they weren't a bad lot. I was anxious to get them on the schooner and on our way to Bluefields.

The night before sailing, I was in a *cantina* with Red Gallagher, a trained soldier and a decent chap, and Freddie Richards. Freddie had come to the Canal Zone to sell sewing machines, but hadn't had much success. He joined up with me, claiming he was an expert with machine guns—a statement which, I learned later, was greatly exaggerated.

The *cantina* was crowded; the air was thick with smoke and reeked with stale wine. Three of the questionable characters whom I had enlisted entered and walked quickly to the bar, which had been installed for the American trade during the building of the Canal.

I didn't like the actions of these men. They were too furtive, too tense. At the bar they stared straight ahead, as if they were waiting for somebody. Then a crowd of men entered the *cantina*: dark, swarthy, typical Canal Zone killers. As they headed for my three men at the bar, I yelled to Gallagher and Richards: "We're getting out of here!"

It was the old one-two brawl trick, practiced so successfully in Central America. My men at the bar, bought off by President Madriz's spies, would start the fight. No matter what happened next, the Canal Zone police couldn't blame Madriz's men, because my men had

started the trouble. A killing in a free-for-all brawl down there was self-defense, and little was done about it.

Richards, Gallagher and I started for the door, but we didn't move fast enough. The fight started at the bar, and about ten of Madriz's men were barring the way to the door. I knew there would be others behind them, and we would be outmaneuvered three or four to one.

Then I saw the man get up from the table. I hadn't noticed him before, and in that split second I only saw that he was short and heavy-set. With a resounding yell—"Come on!"—he went head-first into the barrier formed by President Madriz's men. Bodies seemed to fly in every direction as he crashed into them like a fullback.

The three of us didn't hesitate. With knives flying around us, we went through that opening wedge, and we got to the street on hands and knees. The short, heavy-set man was also there.

It was no time for a formal introduction. We leaped up and sprinted for our hotel. Inside my room I turned to the man and said, "Hello. Who are you?"

He grinned. "Sammie Dreben is the name. I saw the trick they were trying to play on you, and I thought maybe I could help you."

He didn't look like a fighter; he looked more like a vaudeville comedian. His nose was the biggest nose I ever saw on a man. His body was short and squat, and the stomach strained hard against the belt. The grin on his face was pleasant and friendly. His dress was a checkered blue serge suit, a purple shirt and a flat straw hat.

"You saved our lives," I said to him. "I am Vic Gordon. I'm here to recruit men to fight with Governor Estrada down in Nicaragua. If you want a job, you can have it at a good price."

Sammie shook his head. "I've had two hitches in the American army," he said. "I had a try at this revolution business in Guatemala with Manuel Colaria. I had a narrow escape from the firing squad. I don't like firing squads. I am a shirt salesman now."

Sammie's accent was easy to identify: New York City, lower East Side. I later learned he was born in Poltrov, Russia. He had emigrated to America in 1899. Times were hard on the lower East Side and, being impressed with the \$15-a-month private's pay he enlisted.

His two enlistments were routine; the fighting was mostly over in the Philippines. He got his final discharge on July 17, 1907. Bill Hannegan, Commissioner of Public Health in San Francisco, had known Sammie during his first hitch in the army, and Hannegan offered Sammie the unique job of official rat catcher for San Francisco. He received a salary, plus a bonus for every rat killed. Sammie said he kept that job until the ghosts of

countless hordes of rats began to haunt him and he gave it up.

He had come to the Canal Zone as a salesman for a brand of red, blue, and purple shirts, manufactured in Massachusetts. His excursion into the revolution in Guatemala was an unfortunate sideline.

The next day, when I sailed with my army on an old coastal schooner for Bluefields, I never expected to see Sammie Dreben again. I certainly never suspected that I was the instrument that would start the legend of Sammie Dreben snowballing down through history.

Five months later I was still in the town of Bluefields. My state of mind was far from happy. Governor Estrada's campaign had been one military blunder after another. On that afternoon of September 10 the remnants of his army—ragged, hungry and discouraged—were holed up in Bluefields like cornered rats. Federals' old tub of a gunboat *Venus* would lob shells into Bluefields, usually picking the meal hours to entertain us. The shells were big old-fashioned cannon balls, not high explosives, and they did no damage unless they hit you direct. The *Venus* didn't shut us off completely from the sea; we slipped schooners in at night with supplies and a few new recruits from the Canal Zone.

In the meantime, General Lara had recruited a new army of 6,000 and had crossed Lake Nicaragua. Now he was grouping his men for a frontal attack on Bluefields. We had our backs to the sea, and there was no escape. We might hold out several days; then it would end in the usual bloody massacre.

The door to the house I used as an office opened. When I looked up, I was staring at Sammie Dreben. He was wearing the purple shirt, the natty blue serge suit and the flat straw hat—and he was grinning at me.

"I want a job," he said. "You promised me a job if I wanted one."

I shook his hand without any enthusiasm. "Sammie," I asked him, "why in hell did you come here? This is a death trap."

"Death traps don't worry me," Sammie answered. "These damned natives down here won't buy my wonderful shirts, so to hell with being a salesman. I'm a soldier and hungry. How's the grub line for a new recruit?"

"Terrible," I replied. "We're on short rations. And I mean short."

Sammie gave me one of his hearty belly laughs. He was always laughing, even when he was fighting against deadly odds in the midst of battle. I underestimated his talents as a scavenger, a soldier who could find food when there wasn't any. Sammie was the master of them all, the supreme and the magnificent scavenger.

That night we sat down—Red Gallagher, Richards, Barton, myself, and Sammie—to a feast of goat steak, tortillas, goat milk, plantains. But we were never destined to get our half-starved fingers on any of that food. There was a dull roar out in the harbor. The gunboat *Venus* was giving us our evening serenade. A shell whined; then there was a

splintering and crashing roar. The shell went through the top of the house.

Plaster, mud, debris—and the dirt and dust that had settled for a hundred years in that old roof—showered down on us, covering our food with a thick layer of filth. When I got the dust and dirt out of my eyes, I saw Sammie standing near the table. He was staring at the food with such sadness as I had never before seen on a human face. His eyes were blinking as if to hold back the tears.

"Who in hell," he yelled, "did that to my food?"

I told him about the gunboat, and he asked a lot of questions. Then we all left the house to get what short rations were available. I didn't see Sammie any more that night.

The next morning I was awakened around dawn by wild yelling and the unearthly shrieking of a boat whistle. I leaped out of bed, pulled on my trousers and grabbed my gun, certain that an attack was coming by sea.

Outside, there was a large crowd near the wharf, and steaming for Bluefields was the gunboat *Venus*. The crowd was cheering the oncoming gunboat.

White flags were flying from the masts of the gunboat. Standing on the bridge was Sammie, still wearing his blue suit, purple shirt, and flat straw hat. At his side was Red Gallagher.

Angered by the loss of his food the night before, and knowing life wouldn't be worth living in Bluefields as long as the boat was in the harbor, Sammie had conceived a brilliant plan to capture the *Venus*. Enlisting the aid of Gallagher, he had got two large rowboats, filled them with machete men, and started out looking for the *Venus*.

Sammie and Gallagher located the *Venus* in the Batista inlet in the harbor. About an hour before dawn they boarded it. The crew was awakened by the blood-curdling screams of the machete men. The fight was quickly over, and Sammie was in command of the gunboat.

This was Bluefields' introduction to Sammie, and they made it an event to be long remembered. Governor Estrada and General Mena planted kisses of effervescent gratitude on Sammie's cheeks. But what pleased Sammie far more was the sumptuous feast he sat down to with the governor and the general.

The capture of the gunboat enabled Estrada to retake the customs house. This gave his ragged army some gold and a shot in the arm, but they needed more than that. General Lara, infuriated at the loss of the *Venus*, was already starting the attack on Bluefields. It came at dawn on September 14, 1910.

Bluefields was defended by five trenches. The two outer ones were three miles from the city and not heavily fortified. General Mena had little hope of holding them. The few troops there were supposed to delay the attack until the three inner trenches, which had log barricades and dugouts.

In the two days before the attack, I had come to know Sammie Dreben as a man possessing unusual knowledge of

military tactics, and a born leader. I put him in command of the second machine-gun squad. The plan of battle down there seldom varied. Machine guns on the flanks, foot soldiers in the center, and the wild-eyed machete men waiting at the rear for their charge of death.

The roar of rifle and artillery fire was deafening as Sammie and I rushed our squads to positions on the right and left flanks of the third of the inner trenches. We didn't move any too fast. The soldiers in the trenches two miles ahead were retreating. Sammie and I crouched behind the trench to discuss our plans. Barefoot native soldiers, in dun-colored uniforms and straw hats, were running around in circles, yelling at each other.

You could distinguish the officers of the line only by the *caites*, native sandals, they wore. They were trying to get their men in the trench. An old 75 Krupp cannon had been pulled up near us. This fired individual projectiles, backed by black powder in sacks. Every time it roared, Sammie and I were set back on our heels and a cloud of black powder covered us.

Our conference ended abruptly. The Federals were near the trench. Sammie and I made a run for our machine-gun positions. As I got to where my men were stationed, a sickening feeling swept over me. Freddie Richards, who had claimed to know machine guns, had our one quick-firing gun apart, and the pieces were strewn over the ground.

I yelled at him, "My God! Get that gun together!"

He gave me a blank and sickly stare. I had no time to argue with him. I picked up the old Gatling gun, a "turn-and-crank-em" machine, huge and awkward, with a cluster of barrels revolving on a brass tube in the front, and bearings at the rear. One man had to turn a heavy crank while two men fed it ammunition.

Fortunately, the old Gatling gun kept cranking long enough for us to stop that first charge. About 20 Federals lay dead in front of us, and in those days the loss of 20 men in a charge usually stopped the attack momentarily.

Sammie, on the other flank, had better luck. His rapid-firing machine gun was in order. I could see him running from one man to another, still wearing his purple shirt, his blue serge suit and his straw hat. They weren't quite as neat and trim as when he first reported to me.

At four o'clock the big attack came. General Lara had brought up two French 75 artillery pieces. They weren't very accurate, but they had a demoralizing effect on our center. Two shells hitting the logs could have started a stampede from the center.

Sammie and I got back to the second trench without losing any men; it was a miracle we didn't lose both our squads. The battle was over for the day. We lay down on the ground utterly exhausted. There was no doubt in my mind what would happen on the morrow.

Sammie seemed strangely unconcerned. He lay on his fat belly, his straw hat—now battered and dirty—pushed back on his head. He was making marks in the

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dirt. "It'll be easy," he said, "like eating apple pie, when they attack tomorrow morning."

"Yeah," I countered. "It'll be easy like swimming the Atlantic."

"How much dynamite do they have in Bluefields?" Sammie asked.

"Plenty," said I. "But why?"

Sammie outlined his plan. It was daring in many details, and it proved to be far more daring than we dreamed. This was the plan: plant dynamite in the last two trenches during the night. Have our soldiers retreat in the morning. When the Federals were in the trenches, explode the dynamite. Many would be killed; the shock of what happened would demoralize the balance.

By daybreak we had completed the dynamiting of the trenches. Then we discovered we had made one fatal miscalculation. There was plenty of dynamite in Bluefields, but the supply of electric wire was limited. When we attached what was left to the push lever box that would ignite the dynamite, we found there wasn't enough to take the box out of danger.

With the first signs of dawn, General Lara started his attack using his machete men. Our soldiers didn't stay long enough in the trenches to fire a greeting shot; they came stampeding back like 2,000 frightened steers. I was caught in the onrush and carried back 100 yards before I could disentangle myself.

When I did, I saw the Federals were in the trenches. In that split second I got a glimpse of Sammie. He had fallen flat on the ground near the push-lever box, which was in the dynamite area.

I saw him rise to his knees, the Federals all around him. He saw me and then his hands were on the push lever.

I let out a wild yell: "Don't, Sammie! You'll be killed!"

My words were swallowed up by a thundering explosion that seemed to come from the bowels of the earth. Geysers of dirt, logs, lumber, and human bodies shot high into the air. The concussion from it knocked me down.

I stumbled weakly in the direction

where the push-lever box had been. At first all I saw was dirt and timber and rocks. No box. No Sammie. Then I saw a part of his blue suit under a log. I grabbed the log and pulled it away. There was Sammie, with most of his natty clothes blown off his body. He grinned weakly at me.

"That log," he said. "I figured it would save me. It was a chance, but we'd all have been killed anyway."

What happened next in the battle of Bluefields is now history. General Mena's machete men, charging through the opening left by the dynamited trenches, cut General Lara's troops to pieces. A month later we marched into Managua and I collected the \$25,000 Estrada had promised me for the services of my army.

Much has been written about the part Sammie played in Pancho Villa's rise to fame. None of the accounts tell how close Sammie came to death at his first meeting with Villa. Sammie told me the story that night.

He and Tracy Richardson had left Central America about six months after I did. They had gone to New Orleans to discuss with the Castro family the possibility of putting Enrico Castro in the presidency of Venezuela. When this deal fell through, Sammie and Tracy had accepted an offer by the Mexican generals Inez Salazar and Pascal Onoges to fight in Mexico.

Sammie's meeting with Pancho Villa took place in a *cantina* in the city of Torreón. Sammie, newly arrived in Mexico, was entertaining the crowd with one of his clowning acts. He was imitating Pancho Villa, who was then known as the "Bandit General." It was generally agreed that the quickest and surest way to commit suicide was to make fun of Villa in his presence; he was illiterate, and sensitive on this point.

Sammie had no idea Villa was within 50 miles of Torreón.

The crowd greeted Sammie's act with wild applause. Then, suddenly, the laughter died away and the people nearest the doors made a run for the outside. Through the rear door came Pancho

Villa with three of his bodyguards. He walked up to Sammie.

"That's the closest to death I ever was," Sammie told me. "Villa had an evil grin on his face, the grin of a killer. I did some fast thinking. Then I let out a big laugh and managed to say something about Villa being great because he could laugh at a joke. He stared at me for a moment, and that moment seemed a century, and then he gave me a resounding slap on the back and really laughed. Since then he hasn't let me out of his sight. He doesn't make a move without asking me."

When Villa planned his attack on Brownsville, Texas, Sammie broke with him. Sammie had two abiding loves: his country and his religion. He escaped from Villa's army, but he didn't get across the border in time to warn the Americans. He volunteered to accompany Pershing into Mexico on the expedition to get Villa.

After the Pershing expedition, Sammie fell in love. He married, went to El Paso, and announced he was through with fighting. He established a brokerage business with connections in Mexico and Central America. In a short time he had amassed a small fortune.

In 1917, when we entered World War I, Sammie's wife was pregnant and in the hospital. Sammie made no move to enlist, which surprised many people. When his baby daughter was born, he did more than enlist. He sold his business and his property, gave his wife one half, and divided the other half equally between the Red Cross and the Jewish charities. Then he went to Fort Bliss and enlisted.

He was among the first American soldiers to go across. Pershing requested that he be assigned to his headquarters at Chaumont.

When I was assigned to Pershing's headquarters, I ran into Sammie again. Sammie stubbornly refused a commission, and he was restless and unhappy around headquarters. When he asked to be sent to the front, Pershing couldn't refuse.

Trench warfare was made to order for Sammie and his individual action. It wasn't long until we began to hear reports of his feats in taking prisoners. Soon it was like being in Central America, hearing a new exploit of Sammie almost every week.

On October 18, 1918, the big push started. Sammie was top sergeant of Company A, 141st Infantry. The company was in the lines near St. Etienne, at the junction of the French and American armies. A junction was always the weak point in any line, and the Germans massed machine-gun nests there that the artillery couldn't blast out.

Company A lost 90 men killed in their first attempt to advance. Sammie took the situation in at a glance. He watched the actions of the Germans, saw that at a certain time each evening the crews were changed and there was some confusion. Taking five of his men, Sammie attacked in that brief period of confusion. He killed 40 Germans, destroyed the machine gun nests and re-



turned to his lines with the loss of one man.

And Company A advanced.

For this feat General Pershing personally pinned the Distinguished Service Cross on Sammie's breast. General Andre Feully of the French Army presented him with the *Medal Militaire*, the highest honor France can bestow on a soldier.

The war over, Sammie returned to his wife and baby in El Paso—and to what Sammie always claimed was his greatest hour. This happened in Kansas City on September 30, 1920, the last night of the American Legion's first convention.

Sammie was sitting in the lobby of the old Hotel Baltimore. MP's were chasing all enlisted men out of the hotel. For five nights it had belonged to them, but on this last night it was reserved for a state dinner in honor of Marshal Foch. When the MP's came to Sammie, they ran into a stubborn individual. They probably would have gotten the worst of that tussle—except that, at that moment a distinguished quarter came walking down the lobby: General Pershing, Marshal Foch, Admiral Beatty and General Diaz.

When Pershing saw Sammie, his greeting was cordial; it was here that Pershing introduced Sammie to Marshal Foch as "America's greatest and bravest soldier." What happened next caused consternation in Sammie's soul and joy to every city editor in the country.

Sammie was invited by Pershing to join the Top Brass at dinner. Sammie was stunned, but he accepted. The next morning newspapers over the country had the story on the front page. It was a

warm human interest story and the public loved it.

On March 17, 1925, I saw the bad news in the *New York Times*:

SAMMIE DREBEN, SOLDIER OF FORTUNE DIES

I wasn't able to read much of the story, but I did get that Sammie had gone to his doctor's office the day before and had dropped dead in the waiting room.

As I laid the paper down many memories flooded through my mind. I saw Sammie again in that *cantina* in the Canal Zone, making a flying wedge for Richards, Gallagher and me to escape the assassination awaiting us. I saw him standing before me at Bluefields on that day he reported, wearing the flat straw hat, the natty blue serge suit, and the purple shirt. Then I saw him lying under the log after the dynamite blast at the battle of Bluefields. I saw him in a hundred places, laughing and clowning.

I always wanted to write an eulogy to Sammie, but others did far better than I could.

In New York City Damon Runyon sat at his battered old typewriter and typed this eulogy to his departed friend:

Sammie Dreben was the bravest, the gentlest, the courtliest man I ever knew. If I were asked to write his epitaph, I would put it in a few words. I would simply engrave on the granite shaft above his clay: Sammie Dreben, all man! •



I FOUGHT A MIG WITH A CHOPPER

Continued from page 33

rugged Austrian Alps. An H-19—a big Sikorsky helicopter capable of carrying a passenger load of 10—was rolled out of the hangar and warmed up as we slipped on our gear.

I divided the search area into three zones, north to south, and once in Austria, I brought the chopper down low in the fading dusk to check undetermined objects. On the outskirts of Reed Wels, a village about 30 miles south-west of Linz, we spotted what seemed to be the downed aircraft. It was a plane all right—an outmoded Junkers 88 from World War II, probably used as a crop duster! At 0740 hours, we saw smoke, black columns of it spiraling upward from the woods bordering the mountain village of Gemunden. We cut back and forth several times over the blazing forest area. Through the wave of smoke I made out the figure of a man beside a charred shell and frantically waving us in.

"I'm going in for a pickup," I told the others. I was sure it was our boy.

I brought the chopper down to about 100 feet. Remer slid open the clam shell

doors as I started the electric hoist going. He was set to take the man into the cabin. The smoke billowed into the cabin thick and acrid and we began coughing and choking and rubbing smarting eyes.

The man below missed the sling on the first try but caught hold on the second pass. Remer lent a hand and pulled him into the chopper—a scared, smoke-blackened Gemunden farmer! The charred shell had been the remains of his burned out shack.

I set him down on a level field beyond the fired area and headed the chopper for the high ranges of zone three.

At 0949 hours the sunrise burst over the glittering snow-capped peaks ahead. Then as the chopper came in over the outliers, Koppel shouted a warning—"A Mig! He's dropping in at six o'clock!"

I looked up and saw it coming straight for us like a darting comet. I slapped at the controls and dropped the chopper down toward the white-shrouded peaks. The damned Ruski was 15 miles across the Red Line! He was coming at us wide

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open. He overshot and blazed past. The vanishing jet trail swerved in a wide arc. The Mig was banking for a second run, the sweat popped out of me as I worked to maneuver the chopper behind the summit. By comparison with the speed of the Red craft the H-19 seemed to hang suspended, rotors whirling like the wings of a fly stuck to fly paper.

I barely edged the chopper in below the peak as the Mig came over the second time. I didn't know whether he was toying with us and would take off again for the Commie border. But after what had happened to the F-84 and the British bomber I wasn't going to take any chances.

I pulled the chopper around the mountainside as the Mig burned in on us. The Commie craft was coming in on a direct line with the peak.

"He'll never pull out," Koppel shouted.

It looked like the Mig was going to smash head on—but it shaved close and shot into the clear. Remer pressed against the window on the clam shell door and reported the progress of the craft as it blazed by.

"He's going up to sixty-five hundred and still climbing. He'll be coming in from eleven o'clock."

I rammed the 'copter ahead, trying to anticipate the Commie's point of focus and duck behind the shield of solid, sky-high rock. It was like a deadly game of tag. I out maneuvered him on another pass. The only reason I'd been able to evade him was that he closed in at top speed and overshot far enough to give me time for recovery. But the next time around the Mig went into a steep, vertical climb.

"Seven thousand. Eight thousand. About nine thousand. He's still going up," Remer told me.

If he was really out to clip us, I figured we were as good as dead. He could get an overall view from above and come in right on top of our craft. I let the chopper down—all the way down. We were in what appeared to be either a gorge or a break between two mountains. I was going all the way to the base of the gorge in an attempt to effect a landing. But as we continued dropping the wedge narrowed and the wind velocity picked up—whipping up blinding furies off the jagged, snow-piled rock walls. The wind buffeted the craft and began shoving her into the wall. I compensated by forcing the ship full power in the opposite direction. A landing was out. Strong winds are one of the choppers most serious hazards.

I brought the craft into a sharp, vertical climb to get her clear before she went out of control. And two-thirds of the way up, Remer caught sight of the Mig streaking over the gorge like a dark-winged vulture on the hunt. I hung steady—letting the chopper hover but the Mig came down over us and cut loose with her 20-millimeter cannons. There was no outside chance that the Ruski was playing any more. I ran the chopper in close to the mountain and kept moving in the shadows so the Mig couldn't get a fix on us.

The Mig dropped in low and the pom-

pom of her cannons bounced off the walls and filled the gorge. Several hundred yards ahead we spotted a ponderous white overhang. It jutted out the side of the mountain like a porcelain shell. I shot the cyclic stick forward and brought the chopper under it. I kept her hovering there—fighting for time.

We heard the thunder of the attacking jet overhead. It zoomed over twice . . . three times . . . with an attempt to flush us out with fire power. We couldn't figure it, until heavy chunks of snow began dropping off the overhang. The Commie pilot was trying to start an avalanche with the vibrations of his roaring craft.

The jet buzzed over twice more. On the second pass, a chunk of heavy drift snow shook loose and dropped with a dull thump over our tail rotor. The impact upended the chopper. I brought it sharply back to stabilize her. But as I got her under control a huge bottom layer peeled off and dropped on us with the weight of a boulder. The solid-packed drift caught in the rotors and staggered the threshing blades. The chopper flipped over on a side and I felt myself jerked forward in my seat. The instrument panel smashed me squarely across the bridge of the nose.

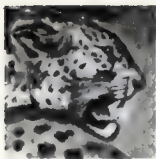
I began coughing and choking and I realized that my nose was hemorrhaging, blood bubbling over my lips and chin and down the front of my flight jacket. I tried to contract my nostrils and breath through my mouth.

The whir of the rotor blades picked up and the craft was righting itself when the wind slammed against it. We had dropped a couple of thousand feet deep into the gorge and the wind-whipped furies blocked out visibility. The guys had their faces pasted up against the plexi-glass windows—calling out directions and warnings.

I brought the chopper back up blind—and then the whole craft began shuddering and vibrating. Koppel was the first to realize what was happening. "The rotors are ripping into the overhang!" I eased the stick and dropped the chopper. The rotors caught again and snapped right back onto full pitch rotation. I was afraid the chopper would conk out at any time. I had to get back into the open. I decided to go up and have another look. I brought the craft up to the level of the summit and we scanned the sky for the Mig. No sign of it, I hung there awhile, waiting to see if it was a maneuver to decoy us away from the mountain range. It wasn't. The Red craft was gone. Either the Commie pilot figured we had crashed under the avalanching drifts or the Mig had run out of fuel and he had returned to refuel across the Commie Line.

I headed the H-19 back to our base for a check over before we went out again. There we were informed that the lost had been located—dead beside the strewn wreckage of his craft.

Testing showed that our chopper had a delayed response to stick control. One of the ground maintenance crew asked me what I did to the plane. "I took it mountain climbing," I told him and I wasn't kidding. •



TIGRE KILL

Continued from page 16

bed, with all the sleep torn violently from me, I could almost see the terrible teeth as they ripped open the throat of a calf and dragged the limp carcass off into the night.

There was much talk that morning, but nothing happened. It was if the Guarani were waiting. The place was quiet but tense for two days. Then, in the night, the *tigre* struck again. He slaughtered two goats and dragged their carcasses off to eat them in the forest.

When the sun rose the next day, the elders of Ubatuba gathered in the village square for a council of war. Six men were chosen to hunt the Onca down and kill him. They were not six giants. They were men of small stature, slender and unimposing. Their leader, Juan, was no different from the others.

Juan stood about five feet four inches, and he must have weighed around 120 pounds. He was slender, wiry and quick, but he was not a man you would choose to pit his strength and skill against a 400-pound carnivorous beast with the speed and power of the Onca.

The afternoon was drawing on. Waiting, wondering when the party would set out, I felt a strange little yearning that Maria would not have understood or sympathized with. I wished I were going with them.

But the hunt still did not begin. There was more ceremonial activity to be completed before the little band of men would start out for the strange kill.

First the native women brought great quantities of food to the square, and there was dancing to the sound of drums. Then they brought goat-skin bottles full of *aguardiente*, a strong brandy made from sugar cane.

The skins for the bottles had been torn from the bodies of living goats; the natives believe this makes them more pliable and less likely to shrink. The goat is hung by the horns and an incision made around its neck, and four men strip the skin from the animal as it quivers in the agonies of death.

Then the six hunters were anointed with oils by pretty girls of Ubatuba. Two girls were assigned to rub each hunter and prepare him for battle—"to give them the strength of love," they said. While the hunters lay naked in the warm sunshine, other native girls brought their skins of *aguardiente* and flasks of *paraty*, another native liquor distilled from sugar cane.

The ritual seemed to end an ominous sacrificial meaning. It was as if the people of Ubatuba did not expect the hunters to return alive. If the Onca won, the dead hunters would have had one last day of extreme bodily pleasure.

As the shadows of evening fell, the six men leaped suddenly to their feet and drew up in a circle about the fire in the middle of the square.

Juan, the leader, carried the single weapon to be used on the hunt. It was a 12-foot pole of hardwood, long seasoned to give it strength and resiliency, and sharpened to a needle point.

Carefully, Juan held the point of the lance in the glowing embers until it was charred. Then he withdrew it and rubbed it expertly with a bone to produce an even finer point.

Suddenly one of the elder medicine men turned to me and asked, "You go too?"

The question came to me as a shock. I had played with the idea, but I would never have volunteered myself into the hunt. Now I was being included by special permission of the tribal council.

I put my arm around Maria, squeezed her gently, and kissed her forehead. "Go home," I said. "I will be back before morning. It will be nothing."

Maria knew I was lying. I knew it too. I felt a sudden sickness in my stomach, and my heart raced faster. I had gotten myself into something, I didn't know what. Hunting a murderous giant *tigre* with a stick! It seemed absurd.

Juan handed me a goatskin bottle, and I took it and drank deeply of *aguardiente*. Its fiery heat burned my throat and my eyes filled with tears. But I kept a straight face. I wiped my mouth and handed the bottle back to Juan.

And then, without a word, Juan picked up his lance and hefted it lightly. Beckoning the others to follow, he stepped from the circle of firelight off toward the forest where the great Onca lived. I waved to Maria and swung in behind the six hunters, wondering what lay ahead.

I realized long before that these men were not staggering drunks. They were alert, sensitive, keen hunters, prowling the forest with the softness of a moving shadow, aware of all that went on around them. The strange ritual of the long afternoon seemed to have elated them for the coming battle. They were tense, alive, vibrant with a primitive awareness of the things in the forest.

Suddenly Juan stopped. We drew up to him. In the light of a rising moon, we saw the bloody carcass of a goat. Tied to a tree, it had been half-eaten.

"Onca, he come here last night," said Juan. "We tie goat to tree to bring him here. Now he lead us back to his home."

The hunting party had set out a lure the night before to aid them in picking up the great beast's trail.

Animal-like, Juan bent to the ground and circled the tree in expanding spirals, his bare feet moving softly over the dry earth. Then he stood up, glanced quickly at the others and trotted off into the shadow. How he had done it I do not know, but he had picked up the trail of the Onca.

For what seemed like hours, we trotted

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along behind Juan. He followed the tiger's trail far back into the forest, working always higher and higher up the slope of the mountains that became a high mesa miles back from Ubatuba.

Every noise of the forest, every moving shadow of a tree whose branches were rustled by the night wind, brought a feeling of increasing fear to my stomach. I knew that this great cat was a killer—one who, given the smallest opportunity, would strike swiftly and silently from ambush, and strike with certain death.

Juan stopped again and beckoned for us to close around him. Ahead of us, and reaching a hundred feet above us, we saw a great rocky promontory, ferns growing from its crevasses. Juan pointed to the dark shadow that marked an opening in the cliff, a roughly triangular entrance some 10 feet above the ground level.

Inside that black hole hid the great beast, no doubt even now watching us through slitted eyes. Quiet as we had been, his sensitive ears must have heard us coming to disturb his peaceful sated slumber.

This was the moment for battle. I stood transfixed, watching, while the other hunters produced from their cloth cummerbunds six hempen pieces of rope that smelled of pitch. One of the men took a glowing coal from a tin box. He held his piece of hemp to it and blew gently until the hemp burst into flame.

In the light of the dancing yellow flame, the others grouped about him and quickly lit their torches. The forest seemed alive with moving shadows.

"Look!" I whispered suddenly. Deep in the Onca's lair I had seen two points of sinister light gazing intently at me, unmoving, unblinking.

Juan nodded. Grasping the torch in one hand, he gently lifted his lance with the other. Then he stepped forward toward the cave, as an armored knight of Old England might have strode to the den of a dragon.

Except, I told myself, this was no fairy tale, no legendary hunt of a legendary beast. This was real. And the hunter wore no armor. Juan stood there, barefooted, hatless, his white linen clothing hanging loosely from his slender form, facing the terrible killer.

The others drew close to me, in a half circle, their torches throwing a weird light over the scene. Then, slowly, they began moving their torches left and right, in an even rhythm that made the shadows jump in a *danse macabre*.

The fight would have to take place in the open, where the light of the torches would show him where to drive home the needle point. But with that long, unwieldy lance, would Juan have a chance even then?

Juan, I found, had an entirely different plan. He was acting according to an age-old method, almost as if by instinct. Each move he made had been carefully planned by other hunters hundreds of years before. It was as if the afternoon of drinking native spirits had filled his body with the courage of his ancestors, and the skill of his people in the face of the terrible Onca.

Inside the cave, the tiger suddenly

moved. I saw its eyes shift position as the great cat silently leaped to a new position. The light of the torches was blinding him, and the animal was puzzled, trying to see where his enemies stood. Their rhythmically moving torches made the forest shadows dance in an almost hypnotic fashion.

The shadow of the Onca's whipping tail lashed back and forth across the rear of the cave like a giant blacksnake.

I began to understand the plan of battle.

This weird swaying with the torches was confusing the cat. Its eyes swung left and right, left and right, following the brightly blazing flames. The Onca began uttering low, guttural noises, rising in pitch and timbre, in a primitive display of anger and hate.

I knew that soon the great cat would spring and try to destroy that strange display that confused and enraged him: the weaving firebrands, the odor of burning pitch and of man.

Higher and higher rose the treble of the great beast's growls. Then, abruptly, I could see the shadow of the whipping tail stop dead.

At that second three things happened, so fast that I cannot recall clearly which came first. The Onca uttered a piercing, blood-curdling shriek—and sprang. One of the men hurled his firebrand into the Onca's face. And Juan went into action.

From his position on the rock in front of the cave, he leaped backward and planted both feet solidly on the ground. At the same time, he jammed the butt end of his lance firmly into the earth behind him, grasping it a third of the way back from the point.

The great cat—a yellowish, spotted beast with outstretched legs, bared fangs, and eyes that burned in the light—hurtled through the air, straight at the slender, unwavering figure of Juan.

With split-second timing, the firebrand caught the beast in the face. With swift precision, Juan moved his strong lance into position to meet the raging beast in mid-flight.

With an agonizing roar, the Onca impaled itself upon the lance. The weapon penetrated just below the throat and came out between the shoulder blades a good foot and a half.

Juan leaped backward, deftly twisted the lance, and threw his full weight upon it to pin the great cat to the ground on its back.

The others then leaped in. With short-bladed knives, they cut and slashed at the struggling, crying beast until they had drawn blood from a dozen wounds.

With a final lurch, the Onca shuddered and lay still.

Juan proudly withdrew his lance from the animal's throat. Then he knelt beside the vanquished killer, placed his lips to the open wound in its throat, and drank of the tiger's blood.

The other hunters bound the animal's feet together. Using the lance as a carrying pole, they lifted the tiger to their shoulders and started back the long trail to Ubatuba.

The hunt was over, and there was celebrating ahead. •



"ROTTENEST TOWN IN THE U. S."

Continued from page 12

Minutes after the three shots had echoed through the night, law enforcement officers were on the scene. They turned over Patterson's body and saw how the shots had ripped the man's throat and almost severed his tongue. As death rapidly approached, Patterson tried to mumble something. But, he could not. If he knew the name of his killer, he died with that knowledge. Questioning of the short order cook and the strollers has not yielded positive identification of the killer. Acting Attorney General, Bernard Sykes, has yet to pin the murder rap on anyone. But, the brutal slaying of Albert Patterson blew the lid off Phenix City.

Alabama Governor, Gordon Persons, was appalled when he received word of Patterson's murder. The next day he was on the scene to give whatever comfort he could to Patterson's widow and son. After a careful study of the situation, Governor Persons formed a special National Guard unit composed of officers and men with practical legal and law enforcement experience. These men were assembled and briefed under Major General Walter "Crack" Hanna.

At 5 p. m. on July 22, Governor Persons proclaimed that a state of qualified martial law would, at that moment, be instituted in Phenix City. The implications were clear. No longer would the state tolerate the vice-ridden menace that had thrived for so long.

At the same moment this proclamation was being read, a caravan of jeeps and army trucks ground to a halt in front of the Courthouse. Armed with machine guns, carbines, and pistols, National Guardsmen piled out and marched into the office of Sheriff Ralph Mathews. The Sheriff, the Chief of Police and all deputies were ordered to surrender their weapons and their badges of authority. General Hanna then named Lt. Colonel Jack Warren, a Birmingham Police Lieutenant, as acting Sheriff of Russell County. He appointed Colonel James N. Brown to carry out the duties of Police Chief Pal Daniels.

Today Phenix City remains in the tight grip of a military occupation that is unique in the history of this country. Though martial rule has been proclaimed in time of disaster, there is no case on record where civilian officers have been disarmed by military authorities and their positions taken over.

The Guard is patrolling the streets 24 hours a day. A big sign greets you as you cross the bridge that spans the muddy Chattahoochee River which separates Phenix City, Alabama, from Columbus, Georgia. It says—OFF LIMITS TO ALL MILITARY PERSONNEL. No longer can the troops, nearly 40,000 of them at Fort Benning, near Columbus, come rushing over to mix in the vice pits and gambling dens that festered

right in the heart of Dixie. Phenix City has been Off Limits before. But Army brass never had the guts to keep it off. Pressure from politicians always won out, and after a while the orders would be rescinded.

Hugh Bentley's outrage at the killing of Albert Patterson was exceeded only by his joy in seeing the Guard arrive to begin the cleanup task he had tried to promote with so little success. Bentley, a soft-spoken sporting goods dealer, had founded the Russell Betterment Association back in 1951. The plan of the RBA was to force the crooked element out of Phenix City and the whole of Russell County, and give the honest citizens a chance to build up business. But the racketeers were well organized and well protected. They served notice that they didn't wish to be interfered with by people they called "fanatic do-gooders."

Election day of 1952 found Bentley and other members of the RBA watching the local polling places for signs of vote selling that had long been rumored. They figured if a straight election could be held, some of the reform candidates they backed might have a chance of being elected. But, before they had a chance to nab a vote seller, they were attacked and given a severe beating by a gang of hoodlums.

Having defeated the RBA, the hoodlums returned to their money-making rackets. Who were their victims, and why did they willingly come in to be fleeced? Let's take a look.

You're G.I. Joe, stationed just across the river from Sin Town. You and your buddies represent about \$8,000,000 a month in paychecks, and you're looking for a place to spend it and have a good time. Maybe you take a ride out to one of the most notorious joints to be uncovered by the cleanup. It was a small restaurant and bar where fish and drinks were sold as a front for a vicious prostitution racket. Casual customers were unaware of what was taking place only a few feet from them. Behind the dining room, a door led to a hallway. On both sides of the hallway were rooms equipped with beds, chairs, and dressing tables. A bouncer was always in the hallway to see that no trouble developed. A soldier would choose one of the girls who stood in the hallway waiting and enter her room. It was a fairly expensive proposition. The list price was \$10 for 10 minutes, but \$25 for 30 minutes could be arranged.

Occasionally a token raid was conducted. Then, the dive was moved to another location. On the Saturday following payday, so many G. I.'s would turn up that the operator would set up a small "tent city" in back of the place to accommodate the crowd.

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At the top, all organized prostitution was controlled by a same tight syndicate. The soldier or civilian (plenty came over from the mills and farms in the area) who entered any of the joints was automatically forfeiting his money. As one informant said, "What the girls didn't get, the gambling tables did. If any was left, a man was drugged, slugged or rolled." No, Sodom's bosses didn't confine their operations to prostitution. They branched out into the practice of almost every known form of crime.

What happens to a town where the Attorney General-nominate is slain and the Circuit Solicitor indicted for vote fraud? What happens to a county in which the Sheriff and his men fail to stop the rackets? What happens to a city when the Mayor is removed for neglect of duty, and the police officials are helping to keep the vice cauldron boiling? The deep distrust of all law enforcement officials is not limited to the local police. What is to be done when agents of the state Alcohol and Beverage Control Board never "saw" wholesale violations of the law?

In making their rounds, these agents would have stubbed their toes a hundred times a day over the slot machines which filled most of the dives to the overflowing point. In some places holding whiskey licenses, they would have had to fight their way through swarms of prostitutes who loitered about waiting for business. As state officials they could have acted to close any place that did not comply with state laws. There isn't much doubt that gamblers were tipped off about the "raids" which usually turned out to be visits with old friends in the Sheriff's office. Flagrant and open violations went seemingly unnoticed.

Army Intelligence from Fort Benning found every conceivable type of gambling going on up to the night of Patterson's murder. But, M. P.'s were often powerless to act. Their hands were tied like so many others. The Army placed 26 known gambling houses Off Limits to all troops. This meant nothing to the proprietors, anxious for G. I. cash.

An example of this type of operation was the Bamboo Club under W. T. Thurmond. For five years regular and heavy gambling had been going on at this club. Two reporters from the Birmingham News once visited the club. A raid was made at the time they were there. But the raiders carefully avoided searching the back rooms of the club and the real gambling went unnoticed. The Bamboo Club continued to operate in spite of the articles which appeared in the News exposing it. Less than a week before the murder, Thurmond tossed two M. P.'s out of the club and stated he would do the same for a five-star general.

On the night of January 9, 1952, the mob put on a demonstration of violence, designed to crush forever the crusaders against vice. In the grimy backroom of a local rum joint they gathered to design an attack on Hugh Bentley. They worked it out quickly. There was no need to plan

a subtle operation, for protection was theirs without the asking.

A short distance from Bentley's home they parked. Two of the hoods took boxes of dynamite sticks from the cars and set to work fixing the fuses. The others stood in the darkness watching the road for any sign of an outsider. In the house, Mrs. Bentley, her son, Hughbo, and a nephew lay sleeping. Apparently the mob didn't know it, but Hugh Bentley wasn't at the house that night. He was on his way home from a business trip to Augusta, Georgia.

A signal was given and the men retreated a safe distance to watch the fireworks. Suddenly the cool night air was alive with the explosive crack of the first dynamite charge. Another and another went off. Bentley's house shook at its foundations as an entire side was blown down. Sixteen-year-old Hughbo Bentley was thrown out of his bed and into the yard. Shaken and dazed he picked himself up and peered into the black night. He heard only the sound of two cars being started, the release of brakes and the screeching of tires as the hoodlums drove off. Inside the house, Mrs. Bentley and her nephew had been thrown from their beds, but they got out safely.

Hugh Bentley arrived while firemen were still trying to put out the blaze. He was outraged, but not cowed.

"I expected to be killed all along, but I never thought the persons responsible would attack my family."

The next day state officials converged on the scene. Two FBI investigators were brought in to help out. Governor Persons came to see what he could do.

"Dynamite bombings are not going to occur in this state while I'm governor," Persons said. "We are going to find out who did it and bring them to justice."

They still don't know who did it.

On August 30, 1954, the newly formed Russell County Grand Jury handed down a total of 545 indictments, a record number for one jury in the state of Alabama. Teams of Guardsmen began the process of rounding up over 60 people who had been charged with specific felonies and misdemeanors.

"I never expected they'd get 'em," one 65-year-old citizen said, spitting a stream of tobacco juice across the courtyard. "But, I'm glad the time finally came. I guess we were the rottenest town in the whole U. S. A."

When the Mayor is relieved for neglect of duty, when the Circuit Solicitor and the State Attorney General are suspended and indicted for vote tampering, when the Sheriff, Police Chief and his staff are deposed and suspected of a whole host of irregularities, when all these things are present, you have a pretty good head start at being the most rotten town in this country.

But the big boys, the ones that cleaned up while the small fry took the rap, where were they? Phenix City has been closed down. The little operators and the yes men are taking stock as they wait out the long months of trials to come that will be the inevitable doom for many of them. But when will they catch up to the men

on top of the game? When will they place a pair of handcuffs on the man who snuffed out the life of Albert Patterson, Alabama's "Man Against Crime"? You hear that C. O. "Head" Revel, a feared gunman, has fled the state. Former Assistant Police Chief Buddy Jowers found it convenient to suddenly disappear. "Buck" Billingsley made certain the net would not include him as a catch. General Hanna thinks it may require federal assistance to bring back these men and others who quickly left when they realized the heat was really on in earnest. Only two of the big shots remained.

Both Hoyt Shepherd and Jimmy Mathews look like mild mannered and easy going business men. Their partnership has been described as one of the major factors in the creation of the Frankenstein's Monster that was Phenix City. It was Mathews and Shepherd who, two years ago, "gave up" their gambling enterprises, turned in their slot machines, and announced they were going into legitimate business. But, they stayed in town and their "old" interests continued to thrive. Shortly after the indictments were handed down, they strolled into the courthouse and were booked on four minor gambling charges each. They will pay the necessary fines with a smile. Shepherd has been in trouble with the law before. Investigators are still trying to obtain proof that will connect him with the lawlessness that has raged in Phenix City for so long. He has been accused by a Democratic subcommittee investigating election frauds, of being the head of a political machine backed by gambling and racketeering interests. Someday, the full story may come out.

"I'll tell it, if I live," said Shepherd recently. Perhaps he realizes that his days as a kingpin are ended.

Honest eyes are watching the Grand Jury, hoping and waiting.

What does the future hold in store for the town that sin built and has now destroyed? By the time the new administration takes over in January and the Guardsmen go home, perhaps a ground-work can be laid so that gangsterism has no chance to creep back in. The limited martial law has begun to irk the honest folks who again want a chance to administer their town. But, where the law went blind once, it could happen again.

The gates of Fort Benning will still be open and the pleasure-seeking soldiers will continue to look for a place to spend their paychecks. It is unlikely that the B-girls, the prostitutes and the racketeers will vanish overnight. Already some of the punks are making plans to rebuild their bankrupt vice empire. They know that the heat must come off someday. Those who escape with light jail sentences or fines are ready to plunge back into operation as soon as they feel it is "safe." Some, having measured the loopholes carefully, will escape altogether.

Today Phenix City lies smoldering. What will be built in place of the gaudy honky-tonk town? Another even greater Sodom, or a clean city where an honest man has a chance?

No one knows the answer. •

BEST SELLING NOVEL IN THIS ISSUE

....AND BE MY LOVE



It started as a harmless drunk, but when he woke up, he found he was married to Hollywood's No. 1 beauty. That was O.K. too —except that she happened to belong to the Coast's No. 1 killer

by Ledru Baker, Jr.

CAVALIER'S JANUARY 1955 NOVEL

Reprint of the Gold Medal Novel, AND BE MY LOVE. Copyright 1951 by Ledru Baker, Jr.



CHAPTER ONE

I ripped the papers out of the typewriter, separated the copies, and stapled the originals together. I felt clean; this installment had put me six weeks ahead of the "Terror Tales" series, boosting me well over into next option time. Reaching into the desk, I took out a bottle, winked at the old boy on the label, and leaned back to dream up another show before bedtime. Then the phone rang.

I walked across the room, picked up the receiver, and flopped on the divan. The sensual, demanding sound of *rumba* music coupled with the mad montage of muffled voices spewed into my ear. My interest rose when a woman's voice entered the scene, gently arguing with a man as if she were afraid of him. His deep commanding tone was like something from out of the sea and sounded vaguely familiar, but her voice was soft and pleasingly low, and I immediately liked it. Phone calls from night clubs on Saturday night sometimes end up nicely with silken sheets and warm arms and auburn curls.

"Robbins?" a deep voice boomed out.

"That's right. Who's this?"

The voice guffawed heartily.

"Tony di Marco!" I yelled into the phone.

"When did they let you out?"

"Don'tcha read the papers? I served my time and paid off. Come on over and have a drink."

"You're still my friend after what I wrote? I heard it knocked your chances for a parole into a cocked hat."

"Hell, I love ya, Billy. That piece did me more good than twenty paroles. Besides, I heard it cost you your job."

"Yeah, but writing it did me more good than twenty jobs—it says somewhere."

"Come on over and have a drink," he bawled out.

"Where are you? Down at the Policeman's Ball?" I asked.

"Honest to God, Billy, you're fabulous. Ain't changed a bit."

"Just get in town, Tony?" I grinned into the phone.

"I been gone about a month, got back last night. How about comin' over? I wanta see you tonight."

"Hell, man, there are eight hundred night clubs and dives in this town. Which one are you hooked up in?"

"Billy!" His voice was excited. "I'm at my new place, the Atlantis Club, corner of Sunset and La Plaza. The stimulating atmosphere of ancient culture wrapped up and served to you by Tony di Marco, friend of all. How about comin' over?"

"Call off your boys, I'll be right down. Say, I thought Uncle Sam took you right down to your last pair of shorts."

"I'll tell you sometime. Tell Shelly I sent for you."

I changed into my best, a blue pin-striped deal they had created into an all-shoulders, no-hips suit. For some reason, probably because I was getting mellow, I liked what the mirror showed, six-feet-two of successful writer. The face that reflected back wasn't exactly a happy one, but then, you can't have everything.

For just another look, I went over to my favorite window. West Los Angeles sprawled out in front of me like an indolent woman reclining on a king-sized bed, inspired as a saint and wicked as a harlot all at the same time. Many times when I could neither sleep nor write, she would be down there beckoning to me, and I would go and talk with her. She could be as expensive as a Bel Air tramp, but her caresses were wonderful, and somehow the throbbing head and empty wallet she handed me never seemed too costly.

I winked at the old harlot, jammed on my Homburg, and left the apartment. She had never let me down before.

The cab screeched to a stop, swallowed me in its black maw, and streaked away down Hollywood Boulevard. I slumped back on the seat, closed my eyes to the streaking blurs of traffic and thought of Him, capital as in God.

Antonio di Marco, one generation removed from the fishing boats of Naples and the high sunny hills and blue grottoes of Capri. If they had called upon me to write a story of his life, I'd have been as well qualified as anyone in the book. I had been a staff writer for the National Press Syndicate when the government was trying to singe him for tax evasion. Throughout the entire trial I had sat close to him, studying his great hulk and small black eyes, desperately trying to discover the secret that had made him as great as any Caesar. It became a personal challenge to me, a serious game that I tried hard to win—but never could.

With his huge hamlike fist, he had battered the top down to his size, and when he finally sat on top, he pulled enough strings to make him the master puppeteer of all times. His annual payroll would have supported the League of Nations—and did buy mansions for twenty-five-hundred-dollar-a-year public servants.

They always said that when Tony killed, it was only after visiting an imported shrine in his home and praying for divine guidance from his dead mother. That was the man Di Marco, as human as they make them, and as superstitious as a European peasant on All Saints' Day.

For some reason I began to wonder what his eyes looked like: if they were still shiny hunks of obsidian from the slopes of Vesuvius, or whether the pounding waters around Alcatraz had softened them into daubs of gray mud.

Tony had married just once and had been deeply in love with his wife. He used to buy her fur coats by the armload and run home eagerly with them. He had a tender little ritual he went through when he draped them over her lovely unclothed body. One fine day when he was supposed to be inspecting his "import" business on Lake Michigan, he surprised her by coming home with his latest gift, a sable. The full-length coat far surpassed any other he had ever given her, and he was humming a little tune as he hurried down the hall and entered his apartment. The song left his lips as he stood there, not wanting to believe what his eyes showed him, but being forced into it by the naked truth. Another man was with her, admiring her body, which was unencumbered by animal pelt.

There had been a terrific fight and she, realizing that her life was hanging by a slender thread, grabbed a stiletto and lashed out at Tony. She got in two slashes before he went mad and cracked her back over the foot of the bed.

The wife's lover fainted.

Lake Michigan's deep cold waters wrote the final chapter to that little tale of infidelity; dead wife and insane friend went down in one last embrace into the filthy water, lashed together and anchored in a washub of cement. She wore her sable and a wrist watch—that was all.

Yeah—that was Marco. He'd love you and nothing was too good for you until you crossed him. Then he killed, usually personally. He preferred it that way.

The cab swung in a large circle at the corner of Sunset and La Plaza and stopped in front of the Atlantis Club. Like a genie from the Arabian Nights, a tall, half-naked guard appeared from nowhere to usher me to the door, his bare muscles glistening in

the dim light that outlined the long walk.

A second later I was in a new world, walking down a thickly carpeted stairway to the club. Oh, that Tony, he never missed a trick. The walls of the stairway were covered with nude mermaids and lustful sailors in poses that would have made happy the hearts of purveyors of pornography.

I managed to reach the bottom as a truly stimulated man. The check girl sexed me over to her cage; her green eyes played little tunes in mine and ended with a crashing chord that swept me clean of my topcoat, hat, and a dollar.

"Good evening, sir. Have you a reservation?" a voice behind me asked.

I swung about and said, "Are you Shelly?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'm Billy Robbins. Is Big Boy in?" Shelly's lips twitched, but he murdered the smile. "Yes, but he is—busy at the moment. Would you care to go to his table?"

"No, I'll be at the bar," I said, looking inside. "Tell Fabulous Antonio not to keep me waiting too long. The last time it was ten years."

I entered the main room and let my unbelieving eyes roam about. A thousand adjectives could be kicked around in describing the place and still fall short. Flamboyant, colossal, breath-taking, stimulating—you name it. Marco had carried us down into a submerged city, surrounded by water. On all sides were thick glass walls that formed a continuous aquarium, around which tropical fish lazied their way. There were fish with eyes and no tails, with tails and bodies but no eyes, and fish with all three, but as transparent as a lover's lies.

The bar was a circular hunk of polished black marble, carved with strange hieroglyphics and Egyptian-like goddesses in erotic poses. In the exact center of the dance floor, about which lovers swayed their dreamy ways, was a life-size statue of a nude couple in a tight embrace getting ready for something.

Even Atlantis in its most lush days never attempted such viciously pagan surroundings as these. It was a three-dimensional version of a psycho's most lurid dream, unbelievable and fascinating like a half-forgotten, erotic nightmare that you'd just as soon not remember, but that you can't forget.

Above the glass ceiling more fish swam. The water was purple, and, like a drawn curtain, seemed to hold the upper secrets in readiness. We were cut off on all sides, and at any moment I expected a friendly octopus to hug my leg.

I snuggled in between two pairs of bare shoulders and clambered onto a bar stool. The *rumba* music was helping to make the dance floor look like the center of a native sex rite. Bodies clung together, exaggerated poses became the vogue, lips went to ears, and hands crept lower as willing hips swayed suggestively.

A fat bartender dressed like a pagan priest placed a napkin in front of me, looked out over the sweating crowd and shook his head.

"Dumb bastards," he said sourly, then grinned at me when he saw that I had heard him. "What'll you have, sir?"

"What's your biggest seller?"

"Atlantis Fling—Atlantis Virgin—Atlantis Week End—Atlantis Love," he chanted.

"Atlantis Love. Anything like the French?" He grinned. "Same anyplace in the world, I guess. Want one?"

"I'll take a whisky soda, if you sell such a common drink."

His face seemed to light up as he turned away to mix it, and my heart went out to him as he put an extra hooker into the glass. I had just taken a swallow and was fishing for a cigarette when a huge hand clamped itself on my shoulder, making me wince. I tensed,

then grinned and looked out of the corner of my eye at a huge hamlike fist covered with bristles.

I swung around, brushed one of the half-dressed females next to me, caught a glimpse of her smooth breasts, then ran into the ugliest sight in the world, the grinning basketball face of Antonio di Marco.

CHAPTER TWO

"Hello, Billy, long time, huh?" Sentimental as a four-bit valentine, terse as *Time*. A long cigar settled itself in the corner of his huge grinning mouth.

"Yeah, Tony, ten long years. Buy you a drink?"

"Buy me a drink!" he yelled over the music. "Hell, Billy, the place is yours."

As he spoke his eyes glittered, and as they studied me closely I could see that they still had that "Made in Sicily" stamp on them, as brittle as glass and just as sharp. His great round face was well tanned, and his huge mop of black hair was as unruly as ever. His clothes fascinated me; they were exactly what you would expect from a reformed gangster in this territory. He saw me admiring them and grinningly brushed an ash from the lapel of his hundred-dollar sport coat.

"Like it?" he asked. "I got eighteen more upstairs in the apartment. Want you to come up later, I'm givin' a little party. Hell, come on back to the table now. I'm goin' to break a rule and get started early."

He swung his heavy arm over my shoulder and led me away as an aisle parted magically in front of us. At first the sight of the "smart set" humbly clearing the way puzzled me, then the silent face of an advertising man I knew told me the reason. He was envious; all the faces were. Billy Robbins was walking with a legend; he was the kid the star had patted on the head. Yeah, little me had made good.

A tall gorgeous waitress with shoulder-length auburn hair glided over to us smilingly. Her dress was low cut and held her breasts like a casual lover. She smiled and bent low to take the order. My eyes at last tore themselves away to meet her own articulate ones, which lowered becomingly and thoughtfully. Marco had to break two ribs before I heard his deep rumbling voice.

"C'mon, Billy, you don't want that. You're a big boy now. Watcha drinkin'?"

The girl heard what Tony had said; her painted lips turned upward, and she gave me everything she had with her big green eyes. I could have sworn a bedroom door opened in each lovely eye, but I must have been mistaken. Marco wouldn't have had a girl like that working for him. Uh-uh, not him.

"Whisky-soda, double," I said weakly.

She made her graceful way toward the bar, and her swaying hips took me back to another girl in Kansas City—a long time and many tears ago.

"Like her, Billy?" Tony asked, grinning knowingly.

"Yeah, she's nice, reminds me of someone's sister."

"Who, the devil's?"

That one knocked him out. He roared and slammed me on the back, leaving me with three whole ribs. I started to ask about her when Shelly hurried up with a slip of paper and handed it to Tony, who scowled, shook his head, and handed it back. Shelly tucked it away and left hurriedly.

Tony turned back to me. "Well, Billy, how about you? How's things going?"

"Couldn't be better. I've got one show on and another one cooking."



"Then what do you do for an encore?"

"What'd you do after they canned you for that story you wrote on me?" He laughed and jammed the cigar back in his mouth. "Boy, that really set 'em back on their rears. Why'd you do it?"

"Because I loved you, Tony."

"Hell, I didn't know, or I'd have taken you with me. It was damn lonesome out there. No kiddin', why'd you do it?"

"I always was a simple fool. I did a straight piece for the wire service, then wrote one for myself and fell in love with it. I got to thinking about it, took the managing editor out and got him soused, then carried him back. When I flopped him in his chair he'd have passed a yam on the second coming of Christ. The next day there was hell to pay—and they gave me the check."

"Did you pay it?" Tony asked grinning. "Yeah, and had just enough left over for a one-way bus ticket to Hollywood. I almost starved until I managed to sell my body to an over-sexed lady in Brentwood. She, bless her heart, took care of me and my every need until I sold my first show."

"Terror Tales?" he asked. "That wasn't bad at all. I heard it the other night. That's how I found out you were in town."

"No, 'Terror Tales' was my second baby. My first one went to a package dealer. I got five hundred on account."

"What's a package dealer?"

"He buys a show, sells all of it as a package to a client, then deals the writer out."

"Did this guy deal you out?" Tony snarled.

"Yeah, but it wasn't too bad. He had such

a pleasing personality that even after he had stolen my baby, I didn't cry too much. Why, he even kissed me while he was knifing me in the back—the bastard!"

"Billy, I still got a few connections," Tony said, rubbing his cheek. "If you want, I could have this fellow taken care of."

This time it was my turn to laugh like I hadn't for months. The guy was fabulous, there was no getting around it.

"Hell, Tony, I couldn't do that to Larry Smedley. He's a big success now, and it'd be a dirty trick."

Tony grunted. He had really wanted to help and felt bad because I wouldn't let him. Our waitress came up with the drinks, Tony ordered two more, and this time I saw a tiny mole on her right breast. The long speech had made me thirsty and the naked ice cubes were cold against my lips. My stomach glowed warmly, and the empty glass was hardly warming in front of me when she bounced up with two more. This time, a slip of paper peeked out from under the glass. Tony saw it and grinned wisely.

"Want a little of that?" he asked slyly.

That rated an evil grin. I gave it and looked across the room, happily warm inside—when I saw her. Not the waitress, but the "her" that everyone sees at least once during his lifetime. It may be a movie star or a whore, a queen or a saint. I closed my eyes and then opened them to make sure she was what I had first thought. She was.

My hand was shaking too much to raise the glass to my lips, my stomach heaved a ton, and my forehead was damp. Tony's eyes were narrow as they watched me. I had turned away, unable to watch her any longer without relief. Seeing her was like looking at all the suns in the heavens; it was too much for one pair of eyes.

"I wouldn't, kid. You'll be a hell of a lot happier if you forget her right now."

"Why?" I asked fearfully. "Is she yours?"
"No. If she was, I'd probably loan her to you. She's—nobody's. Sometimes I think she's a Lesbian, then again I just don't know."

"A Lesbian! A woman like her?"

I've seen 'em all shapes and sizes. Funny thing, all the girls here are nuts about her and go over to her place a lot. She's got an apartment on Ivar. Ah, hell," he said in a low voice, studying her proudly, "it beats me. She never gave me a tumble."

"Why do you say to forget about her if she isn't yours?"

"I've had almost every kind of woman in the world, and I thought I could figure 'em all out till she came along. I don't get her."

"Maybe that's just it, you couldn't get her."

"Yeah, could be. She is pretty, ain't she?"

Pretty—laugh a little! The Eurasian beauty was standing next to the orchestra in the half-darkness, smoking, her face emotionless as she watched the dancers. She was tall, probably coming close to my six foot plus. Her back was curved as she leaned against a marble pillar, and she looked for all the world like a wild animal that has never been broken to the bridle. I could see that no man had ever mastered her successfully, but I would have bet my last buck that if I ever had the chance there would be one hell of a struggle, and though one of us would give in, it wouldn't be me.

I was jealous of the long, copper-colored gown that held her like a closely embracing lover. She was woman; she was mine; and even though we had never spoken, I knew that I would have to have her.

Suddenly her back straightened as she felt my eyes on her, tearing her apart. Her slanting eyes turned languidly from the dancers and started a slow arc around the room. Slowly they neared mine, but I had as much power to avert them as a stupid moth has of staying out of the fatal flame.

Her eyes sank into mine like a panther on some poor rabbit, greedily reading my thoughts, slashing them open and leaving them jagged like a raw wound. They took me for everything I was worth and left me gripping the side of the table like it was salvation. They tightened warily, then moved on to Tony and widened a bit as they tossed him a silent question. He nodded slowly, and I was fearfully glad.

She ground the cigarette beneath her foot and slowly walked toward us. Walked? Good God! She made her way across the carpeted floor catlike, surely and silently, the music trailing after her like a royal cloak. She was something out of a dream, lovely to look at, impossible to understand, and final and deadly as all hell. At any second I expected her to crouch, move her sleek hips—and spring at me.

Exaggerating? Not a bit of it; that's exactly how I felt when I first saw her.

"Varna," Marco said after she had seated herself, "wancha to meet a real friend, Billy Robbins. Billy—Varna."

A tawny perfume reached my nostrils at the same instant as her voice. Her low-accented words were lovely and reached inside of me, tearing at my heart. Her very presence had set it pounding, making the blood rush to my head—and I wanted her more than I had ever before wanted a woman.

"It is a pleasure to meet a friend of Tony's, especially when he finds me interesting clear

across the floor." Her voice was a velvet claw, guarded and dangerous; her eyes were laughing with the careful laughter of the Orient.

"Varna, believe me, the pleasure is all mine!"

Pretty opening speech, all spirited and original. But it was the best I could do. At least it was sincere, and it seemed to pay off because she studied me more closely, probably realizing that I didn't talk and act like one of Tony's playmates.

My friend threw his arm over my shoulder and started to say something kind about me when Shelly rushed up again. Tony scowled and pulled away to listen to the other's hurried whispers.

"How many?" he asked, drumming the table with his large, capable hands.

"Seventy-five big ones," Shelly answered quietly. "Too many."

Tony turned back to me. "Sorry, Billy, I gotta go upstairs for a minute. I'll try to make it back before the floor show. You two get better acquainted," he said winking at me. "Good luck, *sucker*," he added, the last word barely sliding out.

It was an even bet that I would need a lot of luck. Her amused eyes turned to me and seemed to say, "What now, child?" For a second I hated them, then became lost in their depths and realized that I was in love. *Cut it anyway you want to, Billy, this is it!*

CHAPTER THREE

The glibness that had earned me a living for years suddenly went into deep-freeze. There wasn't a thing to be said; all the words had fled from my brain, leaving me as articulate as a ventriloquist's repossessed dummy. My mouth grew cotton-dry. I looked at her, out at the weaving dancers, at my wrist watch, and back at her. Come on now, Robbins, you can think of something to say, start off with . . .

"Nice place Tony's got here."

Just the thing to make a woman interested, sparkling and stimulating patter.

She nodded and reached into her small bag to bring out a package of cigarettes, my brand. At least when I was buying them for her I wouldn't have to remember what brand she liked. *Laugh, boy, you've got as much chance of buying her smokes as you have of making the team at MGM. You're just not in her league.*

My stomach squirmed at the evident truth in that, but I'd have given a lot to be her toast and coffee man, with bacon on Sunday. The cigarette was at her lips before my lighter flared, and as she leaned forward it was a hard decision whether to watch the low, plunging neckline of her gown, or the vivid high lights the flame was creating around her face.

Her face won. It was lovely and proud like the first one you ever fell in love with at the movies. Her eyes were large and dark with just enough of the Orient slanting them to make me realize that somewhere there had been an international incident in an embassy bedroom, a Shanghai bordello, or points between.

She wore her hair tightly over the nape of her slender neck and held in place with a silver clip. Her mouth was large, with full lips that were terribly soft-looking and desirable, begging to be crushed like grapes on the vine. With her olive skin, she might have passed for an Italian. During World War II, I had been in Italy and came to know many of her sisters. Only her beautiful, strange eyes held her back from the heritage of Capri.

Two by two the nearness was multiplying her charms, and I wanted her in the worst

way, the best way, any way in the whole damned book. Her eyes withdrew as she saw me studying her and then in a flash it came to me. I knew what was under her skin and had discovered what none of the Tonys would ever know.

"Yes, I like the Atlantis Club. Few people realize it, but we are looking directly into Tony di Marco's mind when we enter this room."

"What do you mean?" I was puzzled, but began to get the drift of her thoughts.

"Well, for instance, there is the statue in the middle of the dance floor. It seems to symbolize his desire to be watched, and . . ."

"If he could charge admittance, he wouldn't mind who watched him!"

She smiled a trifle. "Perhaps. You seem to know him quite well. How would you explain that we are entirely surrounded by water?"

"That's simple enough. Tony's just been alone all his life, living in the middle of a huge ocean of fear and frustration. He's never been able to grab hold of anything and make it his, forever."

Her flashing teeth showed, she smiled, and my heart pounded. "I am glad you did not say anything trite like the water around Alcatraz. Yes, you are right."

"Did Tony plan all this?"

"He had to do something when he was in prison."

"If I know him, he had all the rackets in his lap inside of six months."

"No one knows him, no one ever will."

"Then you don't know him?"

"Only as an employer. He's been kind to me."

"I'm glad."

"That he's been only an employer, or that he has been kind to me?"

"You're laughing now, no fair!" I protested.

She ground her cigarette into the tray and raised her eyes scornfully to mine. "Why shouldn't I laugh? You're like all the rest of them, not one of you has changed since you blamed your first downfall on woman. You've cried her since you were created, then chided when you had to pay some price you thought was too high. You beg for her to love you and then sob out your poor hearts when . . . Oh, what's the use, you'll never change!"

"Do you hate men that much?"

Her nostrils flared. "Men? I don't hate men at all, I just never found one who could . . ." She stopped cold and looked away.

"One who could be your master, is that it?"

She jumped and looked back at me. Her eyes were narrow, and her voice jerked as she spoke. "You're smart, aren't you? That's right, no man could master me, as you call it, none of them could keep me interested for long. Not because I have so much to offer, but the average man is too easy to rule—and what woman wants that?"

"You don't want to be a queen?"

"No, not for a second!"

"Maybe I'm not quite average. Could be I'm just a little different."

"Perhaps you are since you guessed what no other man ever has."

"Are women more understanding?"

"I'm not Lesbian, if that's what you mean. I like the girls here, but it stops on this side of the bedroom door. I suppose Tony gave you that idea."

"Tony thinks anyone he can't make is probably a little queer."

Her smile was faint, but it was there. "You're smart for your age. I'm twenty-nine. How old are you?"

"Thirty-three and every year a big boy. Tell me about yourself if you want to, Varna."

"You wonder about my nationality?"
"Do you blame me?" I shrugged. "You're an attractive woman."

"I am Eurasian. My father was Italian, my mother, half-Russian, half-Chinese. Does that take care of it?"

"Have—have you ever been in love?"
"No."

She started to speak and then hesitated, looked at me closely, then away. "I knew a man once in San Francisco, a great deal like you. He couldn't be king, and I desperately wanted him to be."

We had each other going all right. Checkmate, well done, opponent. What now? Her mobile face was a study in contrasts, at times fierce, then longing, divided by tenderness and subtle violence. I longed to reach across the table and kiss her mouth, feel those tender-looking lips yield under my kiss.

"Let's talk about something else," she said abruptly. "Have you known Tony long?"

"About eleven years. I wrote a story on him that turned him into Public Enemy number one."

"So you're the one. He has spoken of you."
"Yeah, I'm me, but let's hear more about you."

"All you need to know about me is that I was born in Singapore, studied in Europe, and came to America when I was twenty-three. I believe you write for radio now, is that correct?"

"I work, slave, sweat, and sleep radio. It's my whole life, the only thing I'm equipped to do."

I had started a sermon and tried to cover up by changing the subject.

"What do you do here to earn your keep, Varna?"

"Didn't Tony tell you?"

"No, he only said . . ."

"Spare me the details, I've an idea what he said. I am combination headwaitress and mistress of ceremonies."

"You sing? I'd like to hear you."

"You will. I do sing a little, but no one listens to me. They're all waiting for Kay." "Kay," I said. "Who is she? God, don't tell me there are any more like you!"

She smiled, genuinely this time. "I think you'll like Kay, everyone does. She'll probably get you like she does all the others."

"What does she do?"

"You don't know?" She looked at her diamond-studded watch and stood up quickly. "I must leave now. It's almost ten o'clock and I really have to earn my salary."

"Will you come back, Varna?"

She hesitated. "I—think so."

As she walked away, some of me was right there with her, walking next to her, holding her hand, kissing her ears and throat and mouth. I had known many women, slept with more than a few, maybe even loved one or two of them a little, but never had one of them branded me as I was at this moment. Wherever I would go, her brand would be on me.

She sang for me that night, for no one else. Her eyes burned into mine, and as she sang with outstretched arms, she was reaching out for me and no one else.

Yeah, that was all, she just sang a little, through two choruses and all the way into my heart, pushing out all the past memories and regrets, leaving only herself inside. They gave her a nice applause, but it was less than a teaspoonful of what she deserved; then she introduced Kay with nothing more than a wave of her arm.

Smoothly, the Cuban boys left and were replaced by eight Filipinos. Nasal guitars and mournful chantings replaced the sultry exotic *rumbas* and lifted the room far out in the Pacific, where women are always lovely and eternally willing.

An air of expectancy had floated in with the new boys and the audience turned into

a homogeneous mixture, settling back expectantly, their eyes fixed tracklike on the ceiling. The cone of light which had bathed Varna dimmed and she left the floor, unnoticed by anyone but me. She smiled as she sat down, and we were silent because there was no need for talk. My eyes silently thanked her for the song, and life was life again because she was with me.

I looked back at the crowd, still puzzled at their combined actions, then glimpsed two Lesbian writers I knew slightly. They also were in a hypnotic state, their nostrils distended and their heads tilted toward the transparent ceiling—waiting for some special form of sex. I turned to Varna almost afraid of seeing the same animal-like lust on her passionate features, but she was watching me intently. Her pink tongue swept across her full lips, and her eyes softened for the first time.

"So you think you're the one," she whispered.

I nodded and started to speak when the room darkened, illuminated only by the blue light from the ceiling-aquarium. In the eerie setting fish darted and pirouetted, hiding coyly behind the rocks, performing a special sort of dance. *Prelude*, I thought. *Prelude to sex*.

The musicians were no longer Filipino boys who gathered in the rear room to smoke reefers and trade women; they were waitresses from a storybook land, chanting prayers to their pagan goddess and wrapped up in the ancient mystery of the Islands.

Suddenly, with the swiftness of thought, a pale figure swept from the darkness into the water, trailing a phosphorescent wake behind her lithe figure. Swimming gracefully in and out of the ferns and submerged rocks, she was a dream mermaid from somewhere out of the mythical past. She was entirely nude. Her blonde hair streaming out behind her, her graceful arms weaving in the water, her tiny feet moving slowly, her half-smile, all combined to make a pretty picture.

Her dance was long and involved, holding promise of eternal undying love, and her body breathed fire and passion. The half-smile on her piquant face reached out and spoke to every person in the room. Then she swam to the bottom of the pool, pressed against the glass, smiled a sleepy kiss at us, and kicked her way to the surface.

"Did you like it?" Varna asked. "I gather you didn't care too much for it."

"I'll tell you sometime when I know you better. Did you like it?"

She shrugged. "I've seen better, or worse, depending on how you look at it. By the way, Kay belongs to Marco."

"To Marco! And he lets her do that? Tony boy has changed."

"Not completely, though. Look at him."

He was coming through the crowd that was throwing him plaudits as if he were some Roman hero returning from Gaul with great trophies and riches. Smart boy, that Tony di Marco, he was smiling with just the right amount of reserve that a public figure must maintain if he wants to keep his legend intact.

He flopped into his seat. "What do you think of her?"

"What do you think of her?"

"A lovely creature, really beautiful. Uh, Tony," I said slyly, "you've got a few drops of water on your lapel. You spilled your drink, no doubt."

"Yeah, no doubt," he grinned. "I'd hate to have you after me, you're sharp."

"I'm a writer, Tony, that's how I keep from working. Am I going to meet her later?"

"Betcha are! I want you to come up after we close, she'll be there. You're comin', ain'tcha?"

I looked at Varna. "I don't have a date, and I hate like the devil to be an extra. You

know how that sort of thing can work out."

Tony got it. "How about you, Varna? Like him well enough to go, too?"

She turned her eyes on mine and they went deep inside and told me that they would go, but it wouldn't pay to get too many ideas. My own brown eyes spoke right up to hers and said they'd get those ideas when, where, and how they wanted to. Hers smiled back and wished them luck.

I had a hunch it would be needed.

CHAPTER FOUR

It was a dreary four a.m. when Tony shoved the last guest out of his apartment and turned away from the door with a heavy sigh. I was sitting alone, thinking of Varna and staring out toward Sunset Boulevard, now devoid of its normal, rushing color and composed of deep overtones of gloom and despair, friendless and sterile as a cunuch on payday. Varna and Kay were somewhere else in the place, and I felt terribly alone. I needed Varna like a dying man needs his last breath. Two and two are four anywhere in the universe, and love and desire equal necessity as sure as any man is born, loves, and dies.

Marco scratched a match across an ebony bust of Caesar, lighted his cigar and tramped across the thickly carpeted floor. With his huge frame he would have had no trouble in making the wall of some sultan's game room. He looked more like a magnificent animal than a human; his personality was what you would associate with a combination gazelle, elephant, and gorilla.

"Well, what d'ya think of her, Billy? Ain't she the berries?"

He worried the cigar into a corner of his mouth and scowled down at me. He made a good snapshot of a big shot with something titanic on his mind.

"Really like her, eh, Tony?"

"Never one better since my wife—the damn slut! Yeah, she's a great little kid. And she can act, too. Why, Billy . . ."

"Oh, oh, it's coming, Billy. He's letting you in on something. That's why he asked you to stay."

"Yeah, I noticed that—tonight at the floor show, Tony. She put her heart and soul into the act. Was all that your idea?"

"Sure. Didn't you like it?"

"It was O.K., but if you don't mind my saying so, I wouldn't want my girl up there with all the boys and girls' staring at her. You ought to see their faces sometime."

He shrugged his massive shoulders and said, "What the hell, they undress 'em on the streets all the time. Anyway, that's all over. I'm breakin' in a new girl to take over the act."

"What do you mean, going to put Kay in the follies?"

He walked to the bar, poured us each a straight drink, then handed me mine and flopped back in his chair. He looked at me levelly across his glass and said, "Uh-huh, she's goin' into the big time."

I half rose from my seat, spilling some of my drink. "Good Lord, Tony, you don't mean pictures. Tell me no!" I yelled.

"I'll tell you yes! Why shouldn't she? She's a great little actress. I found that out when I picked her up in the malt shop," he said, smiling sideways.

"Tony, it'd cost you a million dollars to put her up there where she even had a fighting chance. I know a little about this business."

He stopped me with a wave of his hand. "Got any connections?"

"Connections—contacts—drag, it all takes money. Sure, I've got a few, but it's no good."

"What do you mean?"

"Look, you're smart in your own rackets—liquor, night clubs and gambling. You've got a gambling setup here, or I'm nuts. I saw what went on tonight. Well, that's swell, suits me fine. What I'm trying to say is that these boys are sharp, legal as all hell, but they'll take you for every cent you've got if you try to bust in. Hell, Tony, they'll . . ."

"Billy," he said, "maybe you got me wrong. I'm not goin' to let these guys break me. This racket'll be like any other one I've ever cracked. Me—Tony di Marco is goin' to be top dog. I'm producin' them for her."

My mouth dropped open a foot.

"And what's more, you're goin' to write 'em!"

It dropped some more and stayed there, gaping.

"I don't care what it costs. I could buy half these cheap bastards out and never feel it."

"Where are you getting your dough, Tony? I thought Uncle Sam cleaned you out."

"I got it, don't worry. There's been a couple of million out of circulation for about ten years."

"Damn it, Tony!" I said, half-angrily. "Why are you doing this? You don't have to go through all that just to get the same woman. None of them are worth it."

His eyes narrowed and his lips twisted. "I like you, boy, but be careful. The girl's clean, even if you're not."

"Me!" I bellowed, made brave by drinking his liquor. "Ha, I'm the lily of the valley next to you. I'm just telling you this because I like you. If I didn't, I'd say go ahead and to hell with you!"

He stretched his feet halfway across the floor and looked at me. "Talk, tell me why I shouldn't. Give me all the angles."

Sure, that was Tony di Marco all over. He'd learn all the angles, then bend them to suit himself, making entirely new ones.

"All right, I'll tell you just this once, then you're on your own," I said, emptying my glass. "So you decide to put her in pictures. If you've got half sense, you'll make a deal with a good, independent producer, pay him plenty for his brains, get studio space lined up, then hire a good writer."

"In a few weeks when the first script is done, grab it up in your hot little fist and rush out to hire a good director—which you probably won't be able to do. Those boys can't afford to take chances on an unknown. One bad one can do a lot of damage. Now things are really moving! You go and parley with the producer for a couple of weeks and begin to think you're a real smart lad. You two get things lined up and look around for your director. You need him, there are things he has to line up."

"Two weeks later the shooting—and the real troubles start. You've never seen the like! You've got schedule and guild troubles, extras and costume worries. You swear to God you'll blow your brains out—but you don't. There's always tomorrow."

Yeah—tomorrow. For some reason, shooting stops for one whole day. There's probably a good alibi for it; there always is.

"Three weeks later you're a mental and physical wreck, but the show is done, and you're out less than a million dollars. Ah, but Tony, you're not done spending yet, not by a long shot. There's cutting, muting and smutting to be done. You know, you've got to put a coating of glamour and smut on Kay, not very much, but just enough so that the men will go crazy for her and want to carry

her off to bed and bliss, and so that the women will hate her precious pink guts enough to love her."

Marco had arisen from his chair and poured us another drink. He sank into the chair and buried his head in his chest. He was listening all right, so I decided to go on. After all, for some fool reason, I liked the guy.

"Thanks, Tony. I'll drink this because I love you. Where was I? Oh yeah, everything's rolling nicely. The show's set up to be previewed in some little town near here."

"Well, the show's over, and you stand in the lobby trying to read their thoughts. No dice, they don't think. So, what the hell? You give them cards and ask for their opinions in twenty-five easy words or less. Two-thirds of the men will think they're funny and want to know Kay's telephone number. You'd better hope they do because if they don't, Kay's little ship of dreams is sunk before you've launched it."

"Well, what the hell, let's say it is a success. It could be. *Life* magazine picks it up, dissects it, chews it up and swallows it. It tells the people they can see it, that they'll probably live through it and maybe even enjoy it. O.K., you've got it made, now you can sit back and take a nice comfortable twenty per cent. Boy, oh, boy, that Bill Robbins was plain nuts. This picture business isn't half bad!"

I leaned forward and looked directly at Tony, whose eyes were half-closed as he silently listened. "But what about your girl all this time, Tony? You know she has to be seen everywhere, doing every—, well, almost everything with the right people. But don't cry, the first month or two she has a little time for you after her 'working' hours at the Mocambo, Ciro's and the Brown Derby. You two hide away at the little Italian Restaurant on Ninth Street and go dancing in some dive on Western. You have a great time holding hands and whispering over the future."

But then, slowly, something happens. You've rented her to another producer and things are beginning to hum. They're casting her in another picture and she's reading lines at the studio until 'very late,' and she's sorry, but she just can't make it. You read in the *Times* the next morning that she went to the 'Bowl' concert with Glamour Joe. Funny place to read lines, isn't it, Tony?

"She starts to get her puss in the papers now and then, and one day she makes the cover of one of those popular screen magazines. After that, look out, brother, you've had it! She's gone Hollywood, real gone. She's sorry, but she's so frightfully busy that she *cannot* make it. Of course she loves you, and you're just a darling to understand, and—oh, why the hell go on? Don't do it, Tony, I like you!"

He walked to the great window, stared down into the darkness below, then turned back to me. His face was edged with deep lines and he looked suddenly tired.

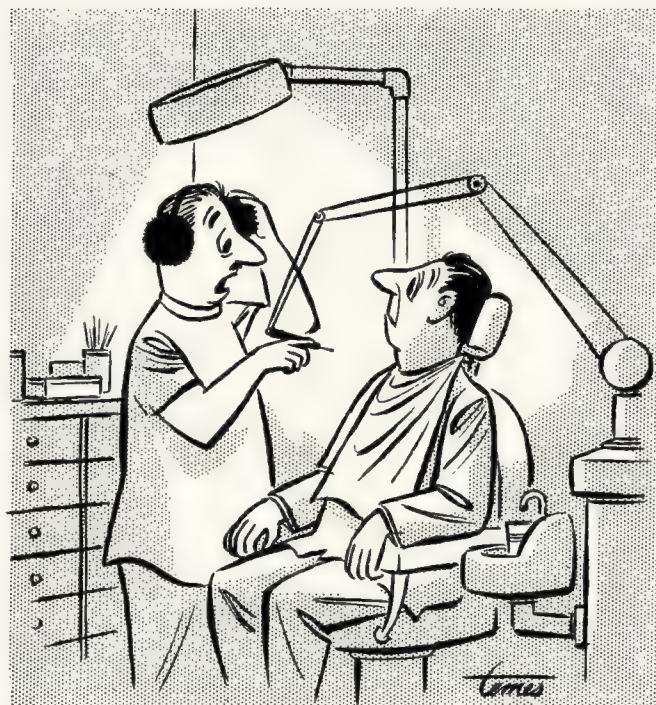
"What kind of a show do you think she would be good in, Billy?" he asked in a low voice.

I walked to the window and stood next to him to stare out at the darkness, half amused, and yet afraid for him. He really loved the girl. That was just it, too many men had been like him and allowed their women to use them for ladders. When they got tired of being climbed on, they reached up for a lift so that they could enjoy the view, too—and got a shoe ground in their faces.

For a few minutes we stood together in silence, then he turned to me and laid a big hand on my shoulder. He looked at me keenly, then said, "Billy, they say you're smart, and that you'll go a long way. They tell me you're a good writer."

"Who, the boys at the Playtime Room?"

CAVALIER



"Now, this may hurt a bit . . ."

He shook his head. "I know a lot about people around here. Like you, I got contacts. I can get anybody's life history inside of twenty-four hours. Hell, I even know the woman's name who took care of you and your—needs till you got a start."

"Why check on me, Tony? I'd have saved you the money."

"I wanted to be sure you were level. As near as I can find out, you're one of the damn few people out here who are. There's too many goddamned bastards here who couldn't change a five-dollar bill if you gave 'em four."

I hope they never get it."

"Good, then it's settled," he said, slapping me on the back. "I'll give you five grand now and match it when you get it written. O.K.?"

My mouth dropped open. I might be half-tight, but I knew I hadn't said I'd write the show. He must've switched scripts on me. He grinned broadly and said, "Ten thousand suit you?"

I gulped. "I'm not out for blood, Tony. Money doesn't mean that much to me. Tell you what, make that an even ten grand. That'll do."

He roared and hugged me, then proceeded to beat my poor shoulders to death. I swear he'd have kissed me if Varna and Kay hadn't walked into the room just then. Varna smiled and sat on the divan, unbelievably beautiful. Kay walked to the bar, poured half a glass of gin over an ice cube and started sipping it slowly.

She was lovely, there was no getting around it. Her red, sequined dress glistened in the softly lit room, making a perfect contrast for her golden hair. Her face was heart shaped and her pert nose looked like a cute afterthought. Her mouth, while it wasn't as lush and crushable as Varna's, was just about perfect and each end of her cupid's bow ended up burned in two cute dimples. Her classic figure that was molded into the low-cut dress, combined with her piquant face made up the woman who ten million men would probably covet to bed and back. She *might* have a chance at that.

She walked toward us and stood smiling steeply upward. "When are you two boys getting married?"

Marco roared with laughter and picked up his cue. "I'd forgotten all about Billy till he came here tonight. Sorry as hell, kid, but I'm afraid it's all over between us."

"Well, honey, I'll wipe away a tear and take it like a lady." She snapped her fingers, whirled about, ran to Varna, and dropped to her knees. "Varna and I'll get married. Dearest Varna, will you have me?"

Varna smiled and placed her hand tenderly on Kay's head. "I'm sorry, Kay, but . . ." She glanced at me. "I like men. That's the way it is."

Kay arose from the deep carpet and suddenly looked at me like a cat eyes a bowl of cream. She ran across the room, and before I could stop her she had whirled me about with my back toward Tony.

"Then you'll marry me, sir? I couldn't stand another no!"

She pasted her lips on mine. Her kiss was warm and dangerous, her eyes drew veils over their brilliant blueness and closed, her lips parted and her tongue explored tentatively. She worked overtime on that kiss—and would have probably scratched out my eyes if she had guessed that I was thinking of Varna. I took her by the shoulders and gently pushed her away just as Tony started to roar like a wounded bull. Yeah, just like a dangerous animal, but my poor, dumb friend was merely joking; he hadn't seen what she put into that kiss.

She drew back and smiled thinly. "Sorry, sir, but I must withdraw my offer. I need a man who can love—and you're not he." Her

lips were twisted almost in pain as she stood watching my mouth.

"Yeah," I answered. "Sorry I couldn't oblige. I'd have liked to help Tony's girl. He's my friend."

I wondered if she got it.

She slowly walked to Tony, who waited for her with open arms. "Honey Doll," she said. "I'll give you overnight to reconsider. I'm going off to bed. I'm so tired!"

"Ah, baby, the night's just started. Let's have another drink."

"No, Tony, I'm really tired. Remember, we're going to the races tomorrow."

He snapped his thick fingers. "Yeah, that's right. O.K. baby, you . . ." He grabbed her bare shoulders and yelled. "You little devil, you almost made me forget. You're in, kid. Billy's been givin' me some tips on the picture racket. I'm goin' in with both feet. He's writin' a story, and I'm goin' to make it!"

She stood staring for a second, then threw her arms about him, kissed him tightly, and kicked her shapely legs high in the air. I could feel Varna studying me, but I was intrigued by the tender little scene.

"Oh, Tony, you big darling!" Kay squealed. "You weren't kidding me, you really meant it. Oh, I love you, you big doll!"

Tony grabbed her to his big chest and for a second it looked as if he would snap her ribs, but she was a good actress with a flexible body and she molded herself into his rough embrace. I grinned at them until I saw her hungry face watching me avidly, not changing expression even when Tony bit her smooth neck. Suddenly I was a little sick inside as it came to me that I was a major actor in the oldest skin game in the world—double cross. As sure as sin, she would slip it to Tony eventually. Her eyes had that restless quality, searching and eager, too passionate for any one man.

I walked off stage toward Varna. Kay resumed her squealing and the world felt better. By Varna I smelled of love and eternal romance. Love, romance, funny words coming from me, but they were there, deep inside, stirring like restless spirits whose existence I had forgotten.

Varna arose to meet me. "I think we should leave. I know Marco likes you, but I rather think he would right now like to be alone," she said with her softly accented voice.

"You're right, Varna. Let's go."

She raised her expressive eyebrows, then smiled; our hands fell naturally together, and we walked toward Tony and Kay. We made our quick good-bys, promised to meet at the first of the week, and started toward the door. Before I closed it, I looked back and saw Tony carrying Kay out of the room. Her legs were waving slowly behind his back. It was almost as if they were saying good-by to me.

CHAPTER FIVE

In the closeness of the slowly descending elevator Varna's heady perfume made me so acutely aware of her presence that I had to steel myself to keep from playing the fool and grabbing her. We stood silently like a couple of wooden Indians while the elevator glided to a silent stop. The door slid back, and we looked out onto a new world, the Atlantis Club after hours.

The room was as quiet as a cathedral, and our breathing was noticeable in its oppressive stillness. There was a single blue light in the large room; it bathed the two bronze figures, and in its softness they drew closer together, making me feel like an intruder on

a love scene. They looked almost familiar, then it came to me.

"It's like a temple I saw once in Italy. The place looked old as love and as far as I know, it was. They called it the Temple of . . ."

"Aphrodite!" she offered eagerly.

"That's right, have you seen it?"

"My father took me there when I was fifteen."

"Did you like Italy?"

"I loved it. Italy was my home for nearly five years. Did you?"

"Very much. I went in with the conquering armies and instead of being victor, she sort of took me."

"Yes, she has a habit of doing that, they tell me."

We were drawn toward the statues by their twisted poses, and when we stopped before them, her hand was moist and trembling as it lay in mine. Her face was yearning, almost sad as she looked into their avid, frustrated features.

"Poor thing," she murmured. "What a pity!"

"There are two of them to be pitied, you know."

"Yes, but I was thinking about her. She seems so alone."

"And reminds you of yourself, maybe?"

"Maybe. I wonder how it would feel," she said musingly, "to have someone all for your very own, someone to love you unselfishly."

"I wouldn't know, Varna. That situation hasn't come up in my life. Tell you one thing, though. I think I might like to be that man in your life."

"I gathered that this evening when you waited on me like I was a queen. Let me give you a little advice: Don't be too good to a woman; most of them will take advantage of it."

Would you? If a man wanted to take care of you, if he wanted to love you forever, do you mean to tell me you could do that?"

"No man has ever wanted to, and I'm not sure I would want one to try," she answered shortly.

"Well, in case you change your mind, let me give you a little advice. There isn't a man born who won't do things for the woman he loves. Take pity on the woman who may follow you, because he'll only do it once. After that, he'll lie back and let the other one wait on him."

"I'll try to remember."

"Tell me something. Don't you have any plans, such as falling in love?"

"Plans?" she said, smiling blankly. "No. My life in the years ahead is a complete void with not even a little plan to its name. Nothing, that is, that includes romance. But I have often thought that when I am old, when no one cares, I would return to my home in Italy and live my last days alone."

"Let me guess. You would live in Rome. Right?"

She smiled. "No, wrong. You are as cold as they say. Try again."

"Cold . . . That means I'm too far north. I know! See Naples and die. You would return to Naples, or Capri."

Her hand touched my arm softly and she turned to face me. "This time you are right. I would return to Naples and live there high above the bay, sit in the piazza, look out over the water—and dream of the past. I don't know why I am telling you this, it is something no one else has ever heard. Maybe you do not understand."

I cupped her face in my hands for a moment before I spoke. "You've got no idea how I do understand. I had planned to do that too. About the only difference is that I would stay on Capri and look out toward Naples. I would never get tired of watching the sun rise over the hills, setting the bay on fire."

"You do mean it, I can tell!"

"Varna, do you know the convent orphanage high above the bay?"

"In Volnere? Yes—yes! I have walked in the gardens many times."

"Do you recall the tower bells, how they ring out sweet and clear?"

"Oh, yes!" she cried. "My home is near there, many times they have awakened me." Her face moved close to mine, our lips almost touched and her breath was sweet in my nostrils. "I will tell you something no one else knows. I have a home in Naples that once belonged to my father. He was Italian ambassador to China when he was—murdered. An old couple live in it now. They were my parents' servants and are very dear to me. As long as they live, the place shall be theirs, but when they die, I shall loan it to a young couple very much in love. When I am old, I will return and send them away for a while." Her eyes were slowly filling with tears, and I was startled to feel my own dampen. "I shall live there, and rest, and dream. Then—then when I die, the place shall be theirs. Is that so silly?" She tied her eyes on mine pleadingly.

"Not silly, but very tragic, my dear."

"Tragic to die? I do not understand. We must all die sometime."

"No, but to be alone at that moment is the worst thing I can think of. Wouldn't you want the person you love to be with you at that moment? If I were in love, I would want my woman with me."

A glistering tear started down her olive cheek. "I am afraid I will never know love, I . . . there is no love for me." She lowered her head and the tear dropped off into the darkness.

I tilted her face toward mine and looked into her deep purple eyes, then deliberately kissed each one, wiped her cheeks with mine, and slowly folded her into my arms, waiting for her mouth to rise to mine. Our lips met and clung together, violently, desperately, with each second the last to be lived.

When our lips at last parted, my eyes were closed and my body was trembling. For one blinding instant I had touched eternity and returned shaken. I was in love for the first time. She had to be mine, not merely for tonight, but for all the shimmering tomorrows and days without end.

"Varna, my dear," I whispered.

Her fingers moved to my lips and caressed them softly. "I felt it too. Can it be? Can love be that?"

Her arms flashed about me, she buried her head on my shoulder and began to shake violently. I pressed her to me and looked up at the statues and was positive that there was envy in their jeweled eyes. Her mouth returned to mine, her lips parted and her tongue slid into my mouth, speaking love to it. No man ever received more of a promise, and my heart thumped in my chest as her breasts and thighs crushed against me. My hands grasped her firm hips.

"Where, Varna? Where?"

"In the dressing room—now!"

I picked her up and started toward the rear. Her legs weren't waving, they were loose and relaxed with promise, but her arms were tense and her fingers dug into my back. Gently I lowered her to the divan and knelt beside her. My hands were eager for her body, and my mouth hungered for the taste of her half-open lips. My hands were trembling as they explored the wonderful smoothness of her body.

Lord, how she tasted beneath my lips!

She pulled me over next to her and wrapped her arms about me. "Love me! Be my king, make me be your slave."

My eyes closed, and I breathed her perfume, memorizing it so that it would never leave me. It was minutes before she spoke, and then it was with a new softness that had

not been there before. Then she spoke again:

"Don't leave me, Billy. Stay like this always!"

Slate-gray clouds were streaking across the eastern sky when we parted in front of the club. She promised to meet me in my apartment late that afternoon, then drove away into the bleakness. Even before she had reached the curve I was hungry for her. I caught a cruising cab and fifteen minutes later was back in my apartment, painfully aware of her absence.

In my restless sleep, I dreamed of her and my longing was so acute that I awakened. A terrific hunger for her gnawed at me. When I finally fell back to sleep, there were no more dreams; just a cool, green body of water which filled my ears with soft murmurings. The waves whispered, "She loves you, Billy. She loves you."

CHAPTER SIX

The coffee finally reached a deep, aromatic brown. I poured myself a cupful and carried it into the living room. From long force of habit, I leaned back in the leather chair, crossed my pajama-clad legs, and switched on the tape recorder.

However, my mind was on the past night as it had been from the moment I awakened. Varna's features were so indelibly stamped in my memory that whatever went through my thoughts had her half-smiling, bewitching face as a background. The coffee grew cold as the night again relived itself in my mind. Each memory returned like a thundering wave from the demanding sea of memories and cast itself upon the white beach of my mind. Call the newspapers, gather together all the boys and girls, whisper it to them. It's an open secret: Billy Robbins is in love!

The phone rang. It always does when I'm dreaming my radio boy Thurston into willing arms, or spinning dreams for my own consumption. I walked across the sunken living room, picked up the phone, and flopped on the divan.

"Hello, Billy Robbins speaking." That made sense: I was improving with age.

"H'lo, Billy Robbins, Kay Palmer speakin' right back. Guess I can speak as good as a Billy Robbins any old day!"

"Well, Kay, how are you?"

"You can call me Miss Palmer. 'Member, I'm goin' to be a big star."

"Careful, Kay. I've seen 'em fall before they got even their pusses inside the Brown Derby. They come and go, honey."

"You called me honey!" she squealed.

"I call 'em all honey, it doesn't mean a thing. Where are you?"

"Not with Tony."

"O.K. then, where's Tony?"

"Not . . ."

"Don't tell me. I know, he's not with you. Where is he?"

"Rush call, big business. He's in Fran Sran—Sran—oh, hell, Frisco!"

"Kay, have you been drinking?"

"I haven't stopped, Billy." She started singing, and her voice, while it wasn't in its best form, was cute. Her first few words, something about baking a cherry pie, were almost intelligible.

"Isn't it kind of early to start drinking? You know people who are people don't drink till cocktail time, whenever that is."

"I'm not people. I'm just nobody at all. Don't tell Tony, but I'm a little bitch with a sweet smile and a willin' frame. That's what a man told me once. I wanta see you, Billy, I feel awful willin'!"

"Sorry, Kay, I'm all tangled up."

"I'll bet you're all tangled up. And I'll

bet I know who you're tangled up with."

"You'd lose. I'm all alone."

"Then I'll be right over."

"Sorry, but I'm leaving."

"Billy, do you like bread and butter?"

"I can take it or leave it. Why?"

"Tony tells me he's workin' hard so's he can buy me lots of it. Tell you what, I'll give you half, no, more'n half of my bread and butter."

"No thanks, Kay, I eat meat—raw meat."

"Then I'll be right over, you can eat me. Tony says I'm table . . ."

"Kay!" I interrupted hastily. "It's not nice to talk that way. You'd better go to bed. Thanks for calling. Good-by!"

"Don'tcha want to talk to Kay any more?"

"Sorry, honey, I'm busy."

"You don't like me. All right for you. 'By."

Before I could answer, she had quietly replaced the receiver. A motionless fly flozed on the ceiling as I watched it, wondering if flies ever got tired of watching stupid humans lying on floors, letting perfectly good ceilings go to waste. The problem had almost resolved itself into sanity when the doorbell rang.

Putting on my robe, I opened the door. A lungful of bottled sex swept in—My Rape—and swirled in my nostrils. Whoever was behind that perfume meant business. (Maybe it was Varna!) Just then a full-length mink coat swept past me and two eager lips pasted themselves on mine until I shoved their owner away.

"How did you get here so quickly, Kay? I didn't know you had wings."

"I haven't. I'm no angel, Billy boy. I called you from the phone in the lobby."

She stood there swaying, a wistful smile on her lips, her fingers digging into my back hungrily.

"H'lo, Billy, Kay wanted to see you," she whispered huskily. "Kay always gets what she wants, and she wants you."

"It's hell always fighting for your body."

"No, baby, you don't want me. You belong to Daddy, and he packs a forty-five. Better go home and sleep it off."

She grabbed for me again. "Not home. Here, with you. Uh-uh, I don't wanta sleep it off with you. C'mon, let's give Kay a drink." She walked inside and sank onto the divan. "Hmm, Kay like, modern—sunken living room and all."

I walked past her into the kitchen and returned with a cup of steaming black coffee. She was half lying on the divan, her avid gaze following me across the room. She reached for the coffee, set it on a low table, then grabbed for me, her little hands busy.

"I like your robe, it's all shiny. Lemme feel it."

"Lay off, Mrs. di Marco."

"Not Mrs. yet. Kay's too little to get married. Lotsa time yet."

"Drink your coffee!"

"How 'bouta drink for Kay?"

"Not till you down that coffee."

Her eyes suddenly became soft and willing. "Anything for you, Billy," she said, tipping the cup and gulping down the hot liquid. "Now, how 'bout that drink?" She tried to leer, but the warm air was getting her, and she yawned.

Sorry, baby, there's none in the place."

"You're a liar," she said cheerfully. "Know what?"

Games again. "What?" I asked.

"I like you. Wanna play a little 'fore Kay goes beddy-bye?"

"No, I don't want to play a little. Billy doesn't play with little girls, especially little girls who belong to big boys like Tony di Marco. They don't play his kind of games."

She ignored that and shrugged out of her fur coat. She was wearing the same red, sequined dress of the previous night. It was

soft and clung to her body, kissing the hollows and accentuating the curves. She stretched, raising her hands high above her head and arching her slender back. Her arms were soft and warm-looking and her breasts glided upward, like twin roses seeking the sun. Her eager face turned toward me, saw my eyes studying her, and smiled. Second by second her varnish chipped off, until half a minute later, when she slept, she looked like a little girl. Yeah, just a little girl who's a little too free with her body. A willing frame. The guy, whoever he was, had been right. Nice frame, though.

Her supple body meant nothing to me as I carried her into the bedroom and slipped her out of the shimmering gown. After I pulled the covers gently over her she tried to pull me down to her, then, with a little sigh, she fell asleep.

My apartment is one of those "Own your Own" places north of Hollywood Boulevard, and just five minutes at a fast trot to the Playtime Room. Five thousand more and I will own it. Along with a swell view of West Los Angeles, I own a sun deck on the sixth floor which I share with the neighbors, their kids, and dogs. Oh, yeah, they "gave" me a garage for my Plymouth. You should see the Cadillacs and custom-mades shy away from us when we steam down into the garage. You'd love it unless you're a snob too.

Kay was sleeping and undefeined when I left for breakfast at Al's Bar and Grill. His girl friend served me silently, as usual. She didn't like Hollywood and trusted writers and actors as much as they trusted their own agents and girl friends. She grudgingly shoved me a second cup of coffee and retired to sulk, her upper lip twitching at me. Nice kid, though, probably good to Al.

For a moment a form darkened the doorway, then swept in and straddled the stool next to mine. It was an old friend, Jack Greig, who had helped to line me up in this town. When I said I was a writer, he accepted me as such and introduced me to his friends and the "people" you have to know.

Just like Tony, he too had a girl, but past tense. He shoved her high, way up there in the Hollywood heavens and didn't rest until she had a place right there with the great ones. You would know her if I so much as dropped her initials. Jack took a dive after she dropped him, and though he had been fairly high in radio, he was now just a shoe-string producer, doing little or nothing. Give the guy half a pint and lock him in a room. You had a genius on your hands. But half a pint always called for more, and he'd get it even if he had to turn magician and change tap water into hundred proof. He was a fine man, though, British mustache, droopy tweed coat, tired face and all. His greeting was effusive; it always was when he was down.

"Hell-o, Billy. Glad to see you! You're looking fine." He motioned to the waitress. She tossed him a menu. She could tell; nothing got by her sharp eyes. She always laid my menu down, but next year this time, she might be throwing it at me. Smart girl, she knew who was in and who was out.

Jack smiled at her retreating back. "Y'know, Billy," he said in a stage whisper. "Someday I'm going to reach over and goose her, sure as she's sinning with Al."

She whirled about, gazed and snarled at him, then retired to her stool, her lips twitching overtime now.

"Well, Billy, got anything cooking?"
"Yeah, a stinker I hope to peddle. It smells up the place so bad that I've got to unload it before it stinks me out."

"I know how your stinkers smell. Let me know if you're going to farm any of it out."

"Sure will. I can see you writing it. It's up your alley. How about you?"

"Well, I have one deal in the air. I think it will..." His lips thinned into straight lines.

"Hell, no, everything's as dead as Santa Claus."

"Hitting you hard?"

"Too damned hard. I can't take it much longer at this rate!" His shoulders drooped, and he silently said his girl's name like it was a prayer.

I mentally took stock of my finances, two fifties, a twenty and a couple of ones. After he finished eating, he made a weak attempt at the check. I scooped it up.

"Uh-uh, Jack. This is on 'Terror Tales.'"

"Thanks, Billy, I..."

"Pick it up next time." I fingered one of the fifties in my wallet as Jack sat staring moodily into his coffee. My apartment payment was coming due and—what the hell! I looked toward the street and yelled: "Hay, Jack, my new dish just went by, got to go! Put this on Susie Q in the tenth for me, see you later." I ran out, leaving the two ones for the waitress. Jack sat, staring at the bill and licking his lips.

It wasn't Varna that had passed, just some little twit who was shaking her way down the street of dreams, but I had to get away and cry in private. Poor Jack, poor Tony, poor beat-up world. Lord, may it never happen to me!

The old gang was already at the Playtime Room, nursing their drinks along, some staring at the puddles on the black onyx bar, others fingering their ties as they tried to stare themselves down in the mirror. These were the actors, and the mirror was dark and kind. Max, as usual, was studying the racing section of the *Times*. He looked up.

"Hi, Billy, the usual?"

I had a few drinks, chinning away the time, listening to bald-faced lies and giving out with a few of my own, just to keep my hand in. It was two-thirty when I left and walked back to my apartment and my date with Varna. I wasn't worrying about Kay's presence there. Varna would understand.

It was lying on the floor and I almost missed seeing it. My name was written across it in a long slanting style, and for some reason there wasn't any doubt that it was from Varna. My trembling fingers ripped it open and a white card slipped out.

My stomach sank as I saw the closing, and my eyes darted to the top of the sheet.

"Dear Billy,

"I am truly sorry it had to happen. I am afraid I will never change. Once I know a man too well he ceases to be interesting, in spite of what I may think at the time."

My stomach weighed a ton, and my cold face prickled. I was getting it just like everyone else in this burg.

"Just put it down to another evening out. You are nice, but you are not the man. Sometimes I am afraid I will never meet him. Well, perhaps it is my nationality, we Eurasians are a peculiar people. Part of the time we belong to the West, sometimes the East claims us, but usually we are an inglorious mixture, and no one from either land understands us. It is well, I suppose. Sorry, Varna."

People do funny things when the balance between life and death, sanity and madness lies in the jeweled balance. They will return to a flaming house to bring out a flat iron, brave flood waters to rescue a setting hen, take a letter that just dropped the world at their feet, put it carefully into a wallet, take it out, rip it to pieces and flush it down the toilet, then feel like going on a crying jag until the end of time.

My old "girl friend" looked up at me as I stood at the window that overlooked her upturned face. It was sad, but managed a smile. "It happens all the time, Billy," the face whispered. "It never misses a day but what

one of my kids gets it. Come on down and see me, I'll help you to forget."

But there was no forgetting, and I went to the desk, reached inside and brought out a bottle. The old man on the label looked back at me, smiling faintly, mutely aware. So this was why the thousands of Jacks drank, swilled it down, swam in it until their livers turned white and sloughed away. They were working their way into oblivion.

I put the bottle to my mouth and drank until my stomach rebelled and threw half of it back. I gagged, drank again and flopped in the chair, then laughed, softly at first, then louder, until the bitter sounds echoed off the walls and ceiling and spewed out into the street below. Billy Robbins, in and out of love in twenty-four hours. Who else but this hack writer could dream up such a situation?

The laughter stopped as it had begun, dying of its own bitterness, and I wiped a few tears from my cheeks. God! What a life, what a hell of a life. I wouldn't miss it for the world, but never again. No, sir, not even once!

The bedroom door opened softly, and I jerked my head around. Kay was standing there. She made her way across the room and she made her way across the room and stopped in front of me, her arms outstretched. When I reached up and pulled her down into my lap, she flung her arms about my neck and fastened her lips on mine.

When we finally stopped and looked at each other it was too clear. There was a woman in my life, one I couldn't get rid of short of death.

I didn't want to. To hell with Marco, he could have Varna.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The fog rolled down Beachwood Drive, resembling great waves from an unseen ocean as we drove up the winding street to Kay's hillside apartment. Stifling a little yawn, she leaned over and kissed me hard, then, before I could accompany her, she opened the door, her running footsteps fading on the tile steps. When the lights flashed on in her rooms, I drove to my own place, packed a few clothes, and returned to the street. Little old Plymouth and I whipped out onto Hollywood Boulevard, east to Vermont Avenue, then southeast on the Coast Highway.

Red clouds were streaking their uncertain way across the eastern sky when I pulled to the top of the hill overlooking Laguna Beach. The curved streets were lonely and deserted, but here and there lights flashed on as chiding alarm clocks demanded attention. Overhead the gulls were soaring on silent wings, gliding, swooping, and wheeling off in screeching dives toward the gleaming water, settling momentarily on the surface before rising with their wriggling catch.

I coasted down the hill, stopped in an all-night café and dreamed about Varna over innumerable cups of coffee until the place began to fill with hungry customers. The waitress handed me the check. I took the hint, and ten minutes later had ground up the hill and turned into a tree-covered lane overlooking the ocean. The single-story, shingled house nodded a greeting as I stepped from the car and dusted off the swinging sign over the gate.

Nine of Hearts. Sounds corny, but that's how I got it. Twenty-two hours after the first deck was opened in the biggest poker game of my life, there were just two of us facing each other. Jimmy Rango had the place in Laguna Beach, and I had the chips—then filled a jack-high straight flush to his "pat" full house. He was a good boy, nice to his mother, so I took a bill of sale for the place,

sight unseen, and gave him the last day's wages.

The ocean breeze swept the rooms clean of six weeks' staleness. I changed into swimming trunks, hoisted the paddle board to my shoulder, and picked my way down the steep path to the rocky beach fifty feet below.

The subsea is a magic world, peopled by fair beings who steal and kill for one reason—survival. When hunger speaks in its universal language, they understand and kill by neat, driving slashes, seldom for pleasure, mainly for hunger.

To my alien eyes, their homes were castles, the vaulted halls were festooned with slowly weaving draperies made weird by the eerie half-light of the dead sun. Strange rooms and alcoves slowly moved past my sight as I found my way around each turn recklessly, not knowing what lay in wait for me, not really caring if an octopus with greedy arms lurked in some cove.

Slowly, my ears became aware of a growing, rushing urgency. I swam underneath a huge, delicately poised stone, my back rubbing against the smooth edges. It would be so easy to lodge myself beneath it, refusing to return to my world, staying here forever. The tenants of the castle who had scattered from my presence would return, slowly at first, then faster and in greater droves to feast on my remains.

But life demands, exerts pressure upon weakness, recalls past triumphs, makes itself seem unduly precious, and requires that a man return to its realm.

I broke the surface of the green Pacific, gasping hard, flipped the diving mask from my face and gulped huge lungfuls of the sweet air.

Beaching on the deserted sand, I dragged myself up on the white beach, more tired than I could ever remember. But that was good for, with tiredness, memories blurred, and with those distorted, I didn't feel her absence so keenly. It was inconceivable that any woman could so definitely burn her personality upon my mind, yet I still saw her flashing eyes, felt that full mouth in its ecstasy glued on mine, even yet remembered the warmth of her demanding body.

I groaned and rolled on my back, shielding my eyes from the sun. *Varna—Varna, why? Why this to me? my aching heart asked.*

It took me five days to return to something nearing normalcy. During the entire time, I didn't touch a drop of liquor, but tramped the hills above the town, looking, talking with the waves of the ocean, diving into them, each time farther out, always looking.

Finally I took to the typewriter. A small shellfish had become stranded on a flat rock in a tidal pool. Like a dervish it spun around, frantically looking for the sand, its own personal escape. I grinned slowly, rubbed my stubbled cheeks, and tossed the thing on the beach where it was buried from sight in a sand-filled instant.

Still accompanied by the swirling memories, I trudged up to the house and started typing, the story outlining itself in my mind easily. After the first draft, I recopied, scented, threw it away and started again. The sun had set, and the stars were looking over my shoulder when I was at last satisfied.

I went into town that night, down to the Sea Cliff. At the bar I drank, not for escape, but to welcome back and old friend—my writing. The world was fairly good, and as I joined in its normal madness I chuckled and tilted the glass. My eyes met those of a girl at the far end of the bar. Five minutes later we were drinking together with her buying every other round. Her studied gestures and brilliant laughs told me that she was trying to forget something too.

We parted in front of the hotel, and I had

just flopped into bed when the phone's death rattle jerked me erect. Good Lord, I thought, Tony's found out!

"Hello, this is Robbins."

"Billy, this is Max, your favorite bartender. What's a matter, getting too good for your old buddies?"

"Hell, no, I'm taking the cure. What do you want, a credit rating?"

"Uh-uh, but you may be wanting a reference for hell," he said in a low voice.

That made sense of a sort.

"Going into the priesthood, Max?"

"Know a big fellow, name of Tony di Marco?"

"Yeah, what about him?" The hair rose on my neck and the breath was tight in my chest.

"He was in here, wanted you. Say, was he the same Tony di Marco . . . ?"

"Yeah, the same one. How'd he act?"

"So-so, and he had a girl with him, nice build and all that goes with it. Was he her daddy?"

"More or less."

"I get it. Want me to give him your number?"

"Might as well, there's nothing like clearing the air with a friendly talk."

"In trouble, Billy?"

"Not sure, guess I'm just kicking it around the edges."

"For God's sake, be careful, you're my best customer! O.K., I'll give him the number when he comes back. Good luck."

"Thanks, Max. I'll be seeing you in a few days."

"I sure hope so, Billy, but . . ." he trailed off dubiously as the phone clicked into oblivion.

That helped my morale. With a fresh drink as my only friend in the world, I walked from room to room, sweating out the seconds. Twenty minutes later as the ringing jarred my soul, I rushed for the receiver, picking it up in time to hear Marco grunting and swearing as he dropped the coins into the box. He started yelling before the clanking had died.

"Where the hell ya been? I been lookin' all over town for ya!"

"Writing, Tony, I've been whipping up Kay's story." It hurt to ask, but I had to know. "What did you want to see me about?"

"I got a check for ten grand in my pocket. Don'tcha want it?"

The stale air left my lungs with gushing relief. "I thought it was to be five down and five on delivery."

"Hell, why wait?" he grunted. "You might as well be making money on it as that damned bank!"

"O.K., Tony, send it down."

"You're the damndest man I ever knew!" he complained. "Ten grand and I got to send it to you. Well—Kay'll bring it down."

"Huh?" I yelled in disbelief.

"I'll give it to Kay. I can't come, got some accounts I got to close up in Chicago."

"Aren't you going to take her with you?" I asked hopefully.

"No, I'm goin' to leave her with you. Not that I don't trust her, but I know you'll take good care of her. That's O. K., isn't it?"

It had to be O.K. If foxy Tony heard me say no, he'd be sure to suspect the worst, and I didn't want to trouble his mind. What else could I say but: "I guess so, Tony, if she doesn't get in the way. I'm really rolling now, and I don't want to be bothered."

"I'll tell her to keep out of your hair," he promised.

"What about Varna?" I asked, making a bad go of sounding casual.

"I'm leavin' her in charge of the club. I can trust her pretty well."

"Yeah, she's the kind you can trust all right, right down to your last heart. How long do you plan to be gone?"

"A couple of weeks, give or take a few days. I'll let you know when I'm due back, then we'll throw a bitch of a party. What d'ya say?"

"I'm for it," I agreed, suddenly tired. "We'll throw a real bitchy one."

"Where you livin'?"

"Twenty-five, Via Stromboli. I'll make reservations for Kay. Uh—Tony, did Varna say anything about me?"

"Not a hell of a lot!" he said, roaring with laughter. "I'll tell you sometime when I'm mad. So long!"

My face burned with hot anger as I slammed down the receiver. How could she talk with anyone about the other night? To me it was a secret like a sacred gift from a loved one, something to be held in cupped hands, hidden from the sordid curiosity of the world.

Hours later I slept and, as usual, when my mind is a tightly whirling maelstrom, I dreamed. Marco came to my cottage, accompanied by Varna and found Kay and me together in bed. Roaring like a wounded bull, he chased me out into the night and cornered me on the cliff high above the roaring surf and jagged rocks. He advanced slowly, his thick lips working in silent hatred, his black eyes boring into mine. I turned and dove into the swirling waters below, cutting the surface with scarcely a ripple. When I reached the bottom Varna was there to greet me, a half-smile on her curved lips. She beckoned me over to her, and when I obeyed her command, she suddenly snarled and lunged at me, a shiny dagger in her hand streaking for my heart.

I picked myself off the floor of the bedroom, rubbed my aching head and cursed softly. *What a way to make a living, what a hell of a way!*

CHAPTER EIGHT

It was a deep and wonderful oblivion that contained no Varnas, Tonys nor Kays. The theme of the background strain was carried by the pounding surf and supported by the gently persistent wind. I was sleeping in a beach chair in the patio that overlooked the rocks and blue water; for the first time in many days I was untroubled.

A soft pleading voice, followed by a warm breath and tickling tongue entered my ear. Being so smothered by returning consciousness I hardly moved, merely opened my eyes while life came back like an unwanted double feature. Good Lord, or Whoever is watching this, she's here again. *Double Death, The Gangster's Girl, Macro's Revenge*, starring Miss Kay Palmer with Billy Robbins in the supporting role, is now resuming production.

She perched on the table and tilted her pretty head saucily. "Well, aren't you even going to offer me a drink?" she asked poutingly.

"The fixings are on the table behind you, make me one too."

"Sure, love to." She patted her dress, unconscious of the way it slid higher, exposing creamy thighs to my gaze. "Like?" she asked. "I wore it just for you, Billy boy."

"You shouldn't have bothered. You'd better learn one thing in a hurry, dress up for people who can do you some good and to hell with the others!"

"You're the people who can do me more good than anyone else in the world."

"A writer?" I laughed. "I can see my wages buying you things like that hat. What did it set you back, seventy-five dollars?"

"I—Tony bought it for me." Her look was self-conscious as she took off the creation and fluffed her blonde curls all over the place.

"See what I mean? Stick to the smart money. That dress set you, or *someone*, back more than I clear in a month."

She slid from the table and squeezed into the chair beside me. Her curves pressed against the dress as she moved—and did little good to my blood pressure. Her hands grasped my arms, and she spoke tenderly.

"I wouldn't care, not so long as I knew my man loved me—and proved it like the other night. I wouldn't want anything more." Her eyes got hazy and closed as her mouth parted, and her tongue waited whiplike inside for my kiss.

I looked away, saw the cliff where Marco had cornered me in the dream, shuddered and pushed her pliant body away.

"Are you going to mix the drinks, or do I have to?" I growled.

"All right, spurn me, I'll make 'em." She hopped up. "Oh, here's your check." She reached inside and brought out the paper that held ten thousand dreams and routes of escape.

The whistle that came from my lips was long and low as my tired eyes feasted over the *Billy Robbins, 10,000 and no/100*.

"Here's your drink, pull up your legs and let a lady sit down."

"Thanks, Mrs. di Marco. I'll drink to the check," I said.

"I told you before, it's not Mrs. di Marco, it's just Kay. What's the matter, afraid?"

"Sure, I'm yellow, I know Tony better than you do."

"Come on, let's drink away from all this serious talk. Bet I can finish my drink first!" she said, raising her glass.

"Sure, Kay. Let's drink, only let me give you a toast. 'Here's to the new bride, Kay di Marco, radiant as the sunlight . . .'"

"Willing as the moonlight," she interrupted. "Only for the last time, please don't joke about that. It's not very funny!"

"You got into it. What's the matter, don't you like Di Marco for a name? I think it's pretty."

"I'd rather have a nice American name like, well, Robbins might do."

"Robbins is no damned good! Try another name, lay your curse on someone else. This boy's got living to do, and it doesn't include marrying you—or anyone!"

She leaned toward me, and her perfume swept forward like a deep taunt. "I dare you, double dare you!" it whispered.

"Listen, honey pot, you're not the kind to stay single. Kay knows how you work. You need someone like her to love you, feed you, take care of you, and then love you some more." She placed her drink on the table and slid her arms about my neck. "Got a little kiss for your girl?" she said softly.

"Hell, no, I haven't!" I roared, leaping to my feet, almost upsetting her. "I haven't got any girl, don't want one, never plan to buy any. What the devil, are you working for Forest Lawn? For God's sake, quit acting love-starved, the market's closed for the day, night, and henceforth, forevermore. Come on, I'll take you to the hotel, then maybe I can get some work done!"

Her eyes narrowed, catlike. "I'll tell Tony what you've done," she said purring.

"You'll—what?" I yelled, reaching out and shaking her body until she was limp as a rag doll. "Baby, you don't know your little playmate like I do, or you wouldn't even joke about it. If he thought you had cheated on him, he'd squash you like a bug. Believe me, I mean it, he's inhuman!"

Her face softened and her eyes got hazy again. "Shake me some more!" she pleaded. "I've never seen you like that before, you're handsomer. Hurt me, Billy, then take me inside and love me!"

I groaned. She was as dangerous as a

CAVALIER



"Sure, I'll take you out. Want to walk me down to the bowling alley?"

hopped-up rattlesnake. It would take only a hint from her chaste lips that there was something between us, and I could picture the scene. It wasn't pretty at all, Marco standing hunched over our lifeless bodies, his hands trembling in rage, and his huge mouth twisted snarlingly. I shoved past Kay, grabbed the bottle and tipped it high, swallowing in time with the gurgles until my stomach began to burn gently. She stood, staring with wide eyes, then walked in front of me and took away the bottle.

"I was only kidding, Billy. I wanted to hurt you. You said nasty things to Kay, called her love-starved. I'm not love-starved at all. Tony sees to that." Her face was turned upward, looking pleadingly into mine. "No, I'm not that way, I just want you!"

"Come on, Kay," I said in a voice suddenly tired. "Let's get you settled in the hotel, then we'll have a little talk. It may save some trouble later on."

Her face brightened. "Good, I like to talk. I'll just bet I could tell you some things about me that would curl your hair."

"I'll bet you could, Kay," I said a little sadly. "I'll just bet you could."

While she was getting fixed up, undoubtedly for me, I settled myself in the bar at the Sea Cliff Hotel. After the second drink, an apparition glided to the booth and stood there, waiting for inspection. She was dressed in a strapless evening gown that was little more than a lacy brassiere and a semitransparent harem skirt. Standing in the half-darkness, a provocative smile on her piquant features and soft yellow hair cascading over her shoulders in gentle waves, she looked like a dream, something fresh from the pages of an erotic memory. Her eyes were averted as she took my hand and sat down.

"Did you ever dress like that for Tony?"

She shook her head firmly. "It was too dangerous. Clothes like these were just a

challenge to him. He always wanted to set some sort of record for taking them off."

"Do you like him, Kay?"

"Tony's all right, he's been swell to me, but no matter how much he did for me, I could never love him." She finished, looking directly at me.

"Why lead him on?"

"Do I hear another offer?"

"Afraid you might miss your chance?"

"That's not nice," she said, reaching over and stroking my hair. "It's not exactly that. I just want . . . Don't get me too drunk, or I'll say things I shouldn't."

Things went on like that, batting the words back and forth for more than an hour. I was setting some sort of a record: Varna hadn't entered my thoughts since Kay's sensual entrance into the room. Once again, life was resuming its freshness and seemed jovial and gay. In other words, I was getting tight.

The Pacific was slicing the huge golden sun in two, and clouds were massing for their nightly formation when the desk clerk bounced in with a telegram for Kay. She scanned it rapidly and then handed it to me.

Kay. Take next plane to Las Vegas. Bring Billy too. Got hot deal cooking here. Reservations at Purple Swan. Will return to Las Vegas instead of L. A.

Love,
Tony.

She got the paper back with a shake of my head. I couldn't go there. Only two weeks ago they had damned near cleaned me and, besides, I didn't want to be there with Kay in that mingled aroma of liquor, gambling, and night life. It just wouldn't do; that way lay great danger.

"When do you want to leave, Billy?" she asked, looking at me intently.

"I'm not going, Kay. You and Tony have got me all wrong if you think I can go flying

off all over the country just for the devil of it. I've got a living to make. And I can't make it fooling around Las Vegas."

"You saw what the wire said, honey. He wants both of us there."

"That doesn't make sense, he doesn't need me any more than I need him here. Which plane did he take, by the way?"

"Oh, he chartered one. He wanted to make a couple of stops. Why?"

"I just wondered. I can't imagine the Tony di Marco taking a charter job. Not him, he likes luxury too much. No, I can't buy that charter story."

"Well, he did," she said shortly. "We'd better get ready to go. You are going with me, the wire said so, and you can't disobey Tony."

"Disobey Tony!" I yelled. "Who the hell said he was my nurse? No, I'm not going, why should I? Good Lord, I've got things to do. Don't forget your picture."

She turned from me and motioned toward the waiter. "Where could we get a plane for Las Vegas?"

"I think there's a charter service at the Santa Ana airport, miss. Would you like to have me try?"

"Yes, would you, please?"

"I suppose you mean for the two of you?" he asked.

She looked directly at me. "That's right, the two of us."

They both smiled in my direction, and he hurried away. My mouth dropped open, Kay put her drink to it, and I automatically swallowed. Over the rim of her glass, her eager eyes watched me narrowly like that well-known cat and his pal, the canary. *Good Lord!* I thought. *She's getting that way again!*

As I shoved the glass away and tried to speak, she covered my mouth with her hand.

"Sh-h!" she whispered. "It'll be you good to get away. You'll be able to pick up atmosphere, or local color, or whatever it is you writers are always looking for."

Three drinks and that many deep kisses later, it began to sound like a good idea. Even when I was hastily packing my own suitcase I was looking forward to trimming those dogs up there.

The plane was sitting in front of its hangar, the propeller idly chewing the air as it waited for its passengers. An hour later as we were flying over the desert and the moon was pecking over our shoulders, Kay produced a flask from some hidden supply I hadn't known about. We passed it back and forth, chasing the liquor with moist kisses until the lights of Las Vegas shone beneath us.

They swept past and seemed to tilt as the pilot guided the plane toward the airport. The meaningless jumble of lights and shadows resolved into sameness as he turned the plane one final time and lined up with the runway. There was a gentle bounce, a screech of tires, and the streaking lights slowly became solitary sentinels. We were on our way to see the great man.

First there were dozens of lifted glasses tilted in crazy directions, the moon setting over the rim of a lipstick-smeared glass, two soft willing lips, a couple running from a dimly lighted bar, a grinning taxi driver and a brick building, some white papers following several green ones, a few jumbled words and a smile or two, an outstretched palm and an open door, another taxi ride into the desert toward a large, rambling building, a huge room with roulette and dice tables, a bar and a one-armed bandit spilling dollars on the carpet, two drinks, an opened door and two avid eyes—then sleep.

CHAPTER NINE

The bright desert sunlight, slicing obliquely across the plushy furnished room, knifed into my aching eyes like a surgeon's gleaming scalpel. From the grounds below, resembling a planned background sequence to a luxury scene, varied sounds drifted inside: warm, low laughter and well-bred, twenty-five-dollar-a-day banter, polite applause as some young diver cut the water perfectly, the distant drone of a plane, a couple walking slowly on the stones of the patio.

Life as it was meant to be lived, relax in Las Vegas and worship the sun, stay at the Purple Swan and be as exclusive as all get out. Come—come to the fair and forget everything. There is no sane meaning in grubbing for a living. Come to the fair, eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow you return to drudgery. Immerse your sagging ego in fine liquor, look jaded as all hell, and no one but the bellhop and the maid will know that you're not a tired movie producer resting up.

I sat up in bed, holding my head, trying to calm its throbbing, elemental, jungle-like tempo. *What do the drums say, Tonga? Drums say—white master die soon!*

"What did you say?" I croaked. "Run through it once again, just once more before they carry me away."

Kay bounced on the bed, smiling and chirping. She ran a hand through my hair, threw me back on the bed and kissed my mouth hard. "We're married, Billy Boy, we're married!"

Her lips were hard and demanding against my mouth as she held me tightly. I shoved her away and groaned. "I don't believe it. God wouldn't have done such a thing to me!"

"He didn't, some nice little man did. He was sweet and didn't mind at all when we got him up early. He was so cute standing there in his nightshirt. Look, there's one on the chair."

"What's his nightshirt doing here?"

"You bought it for a hundred dollars. You said you had always wanted to wear one on your wedding night."

"God, what a fool I must have been! I wish he had shot me in his nightshirt."

"Who, you or he?"

"He or I what?"

"In his nightshirt."

That one rocked me back. "What's that got to do with it?"

"It just doesn't sound like you in his nightshirt."

"Name of God, Kay, don't torment me like this! Let me—think."

She sat up and hugged her legs. "You're going to be fun being married to, Billy. Don't ever change."

Don't ever change. Ha! I wouldn't have time to change my shorts when Marco found out about this. I sat up slowly, squeezing my eyes tightly, desperately trying to shove out madness and admit sanity. No—no! It just didn't happen, this was all a dream, and I would awaken in my apartment in little old Hollywood. Her lips pressed against my ear, and I knew that it wasn't a dream, but reality in all its grim meaning. My eyes snapped open.

"Where's the license?"

"Right there on the dressing table!" she cried triumphantly.

Yeah, it was there all right, sitting in smug proudness against the mirror. Well, that was that, give a little, take a little, and it will come out pretty even throughout the ages. I must have been a stinker in my previous life. Still, it had probably happened before to people who were now gone and forgotten. Somewhere back there in the echoing cor-

ridors of time there had been a poor devil like me who had been in a jam like this. I began to wish moodily that I were lying in a grave next to him, moldering to hell and back.

I turned to Kay, who was eying me hungrily. "Why did we do it, Kay? What in the name of heaven possessed us? We don't even know each other. For all you know, I'm a sadist or a pervert!"

She lay back on the bed and tears formed in her large eyes before she turned her back on me.

"I'm sorry, Kay. That wasn't nice, and it was probably all my fault," I muttered as I pulled her toward me. "Are you sorry you did it?"

Her face was little less than radiant as she pressed against me. "No, Billy, I'm not sorry at all. You see—I love you."

My mouth dropped open. What a great, mad joke. She loved me, I loved Varna. Marco loved Kay and Varna loved . . . Tune in next week, and now a word from our sponsor. What a helluva life!

"I've never had a woman love me before, Kay." No, I wasn't being brittle or smart. One just doesn't kick love in the face unless one is a dirty dog.

"I've never loved anyone else, Billy," she said quietly. "I never knew love could be such a, what do they call it, such a shining and necessary thing until I saw you. Then I knew it had to be this way, it just had to be you."

Suddenly the whole thing hit me, what a beautiful frame she had created. It would have done credit to Lucrezia Borgia. "I suppose the wire wasn't from Tony at all?" I asked her.

"No, it was from a wire service here. They'll send a wire to anyone in the world. Tony told me about it."

"And of all the people in this nasty world, you picked me. Don't you have any friends?"

"I hope I have one now, Billy," she said, hiding her head on my chest.

"You'll need a lot more than one before this is over, and so will I. Good Lord!" I muttered to myself. "Married to Tony's girl."

"I'm sorry, but I'm not sorry. I know I'm a brazen hussy, but right now I'm the happiest hussy in the whole world."

Her tear-stained face lifted toward me. It was soft and yearning and sort of wonderful. It wasn't the sex-craving thing of yesterday, instead it was new and sweet. As I kissed her moist lips gently, then her starry eyes, she clung to me, trembling like a willow—and suddenly she was warm against me and very desirable. She sought my mouth and her lips were warm and intimate, shooting desire into my tired body like a golden arrow. I gripped her in my arms, and once again love was the mode.

For a long time she lay back, her eyes closed and her lithe body totally relaxed, a Mona Lisa smile on her face. Slowly her eyes opened, and she studied my features, shaking her head a little wonderingly.

"I guess you know that did it. I just couldn't love another man now," she whispered huskily.

"Yeah, I know, baby, you probably never will love another one."

"Do you mean that, Billy, oh, do you?" she cried happily.

"Sure, honey, every word of it. What do you say for some food?"

"Sounds wonderful. Be right back."

From room service I ordered for the two of us, throwing in for good measure a bottle of champagne. What the hell! I was rich—a woman loved me, and maybe I could love her—as long as it would last.

I wheeled the champagne cart across the room and stood idly twirling the bottle in its frigid nest. In a minute the bathroom

door opened, and Kay peeked, gamin-like, around the corner.

"Alone, Billy boy?"

"Sure, come and get it, baby."

"Oh, champagne!" she squealed as she flew across the room.

I struggled with the bottle while she stood eagerly beside me, waiting with two hollow-stemmed glasses. With a protesting squeak the cork pushed itself out, ricocheted from the ceiling to the wall to the dressing table and landed face up in front of the wedding license.

"Good omen, dear?" she asked as she deftly caught the bubbling liquid.

"Good or bad, at least it'll be a drunken marriage." She handed me a glass, and I looked deep into her eyes. "Here's to the new bride . . . Yeah, it seems like I said that before."

"The new bride," she chanted. "Kay Robbins, radiant as the sunlight . . . You finish it, Billy. Please, dear."

Her body nodded dreamily at me through the silken thing she wore, and when I tore my eyes from it, I said, "Willing as the moonlight."

We drank, each watching the other, neither one giving way, boldly, avidly telling the other silently . . . Her green eyes were deep pools of wanton desire, new again in their freshness, yet old as time in what they spoke.

Suddenly she was in my arms again, her fingers digging into my back, her body pressed hard against mine. Her hair smelled purple, and her body told of love, Aphrodite, tall swaying trees bending obediently with the winds of eternal desire. With her lips hot on mine, I picked her up and carried her across the room. Her hands were frantically clawing at me as I lowered her and bent into the web of her encircling arms.

Eight was the point, you win again, madam!

The stick man deftly scooped the dice out of play while his partner counted out thirty blue chips and placed them in front of Kay. Without hesitation she let them ride with the other thirty. She selected two dice and wrinkled her little nose at me.

"Billy boy, pray for li'l Kay, she's doin' it all for you."

"Praise be, git 'em all for gamblin', Lawd, all 'rept li'l Kay!"

"Thanks, baby!" She flashed me a smile, turned to the green-covered cloth, narrowed her eyes and became lost in the thrill of the game. Her arm swooped back, and the dice bounded across the cloth. "Come natural!" she screamed.

One of the cubes fell back and lay flat on the green cloth, it was an ace. Oh, God! As if some perverse demon possessed it, the other one spun, barely losing momentum as the seconds crept past. Excited mutterings of the large audience heralded its death as it lost speed, seemed to sigh, then collapsed.

"Five is the point," the gambler said unemotionally.

"This is the last throw, Kay," I said, running a hand over my sweating forehead. "Make it good!"

"Anything you say, Billy. This is it."

Six thousand dollars lay in front of her, an accumulation of nine straight passes. All but a couple of the gamblers were betting with her phenomenal run of luck, and the air was tense as she threw the dice out again and again, breathing jerkily, mouth narrowed and face tightly held in the fevered grip of emotion.

Now six, (God please), then eight, (I'll quit liquor), then three, (no more cigarettes), twelve, (I'll cut out swearing), four, (I'll go back to church), six again, (I'll never tell another lie), and finally—

"Five was the point. This table is closed for the evening."

The air gushed from my aching lungs, and I barely heard the hearty applause as we gathered up the chips. People were clustered around Kay as if she were some newly created goddess of fortune and were seeking to touch her for gamblers' luck. What a woman! Being with her was lying chin deep in a pasture of four-leaf clovers. Why not go to Monte Carlo and finish it all out in a magnificent blaze of defiant glory in the little time we had left?

She was waiting at the end of the bar when I came back from the cashier's cage, waving a roll of money. Her avid gaze was eating me alive as I neared her; the magnetism of her eager face made me hungry to be alone with her again. I leaned against the bar and flipped the roll of currency in front of her. She ignored it completely and hugged me tightly.

"Gee, Billy, you're handsome. I've never seen a man who had so much of you know what."

"So much to offer a lady?" I grinned down at her.

"You're getting as brazen as I am!"

"Environment, maybe?"

"Love, I hope," she said softly.

"I'm beginning to wonder, you're a lot of fun. Here's your money."

Her interest was almost languid. "How much did we take them for?"

"Well, we came in with a little over a thousand and cashed in one hundred and twenty blue chips. That would mean you made . . ."

"We, darling, you and me forever," she whispered, caressing my cheek.

"Have it your way. We made close to five thousand."

"Pretty, isn't it?"

"It's what the little boy shot at."

"I always thought he was aiming at the other thing."

"There you go, putting beds in my mouth!"

"You haven't turned down an invitation yet. Getting out of the mood?"

"With you as the mood setter, never. Here's your money, better hide it."

"You keep it, Billy. Let me have a dollar, and I'll buy us a drink, then what do you say we go back to the hotel?"

"But we just left the hotel!" I protested.

"A million years ago, I had a kiss. That's too long. Let's have a drink and then start living again."

"That's life, huh?"

"Tain't death," she murmured, her hand clutching my arm.

Shuddering a little, I thought, *No, 'tain't death, but it's sure as hell kicking it around the edges.*

She had just taken a five from me and turned to motion for the bartender, when a granite-faced man of distinction, with shoulders straight from the steel mills, walked up and extended his hand. I crammed the money into my wallet and took his hand, trying hard to make mine as steady.

"Good evening, I am Jay Simpson. My card."

Jay Simpson, Manager of Early Days Club.

"I could have these printed by the dozen, Simpson. If I'm not too personal, what do you want?"

"Don't think I'm cutting in on your fun, please. A customer who wins is the Early Days best advertisement. My reason for being here in your little party is primarily to protect my own interests. There are certain elements here, in spite of the law, that would like to separate you from your lawful winnings. My position is singular, it is up to me to see that they don't rob you, and that you and your wife reach your destination safely."

"A martini and a whisky soda, please," Kay told the bartender. "We've been working."

He grinned and looked at Simpson, who said, "None now, Jerry."

Because he hadn't tried to make a case out of his identity, I trusted Simpson and held out my hand. "Thanks for your concern, but we'll make it all right. With my good-luck piece, nobody can touch me."

Ten minutes later when we had just entered the cab, friend Simpson walked to the open door and motioned for the driver to wait. Scowlingly, I waited for him to speak.

"I hope I'm not making a boor out of myself, but I have a suggestion. Why don't you put the money in a safe as soon as you reach the hotel? That way, you'd have it tomorrow, and maybe we would get another chance at it."

"O.K., Simpson, we'll do that. Take care of yours. Good night!"

"Drop in again," he said in parting.

"Friend o' yours?" the driver asked as we swung from the curb.

"Not especially. Do you know him?" I asked.

"A little," he nodded, "but not as well as I'd like to. He's got the reputation of being the straightest gambler in Las Vegas. They say that he'll run the town someday."

He talked Simpson up all the way to the Purple Swan. From the writer's standpoint the gambler interested me, but Kay's hands were busy again, and the only interest I had in gambling was figuring what the odds were that we'd get any sleep before dawn.

CHAPTER TEN

Things kept up that giddy pace for over a week, and gradually the numb feeling that claimed me when Marco's face entered my mind left, and Varna seldom came into my thoughts, not over ten or twelve times a day, that is. We were sailing high, my bride and I, too high, because the smart boys say that whatever goes up has to come down eventually for refueling. We came down—with a thud that shook the entire town, and one that the Purple Swan remembered for many weeks after we hurriedly "checked out."

It was late afternoon, and for once we were outside in the patio watching the late swimmers and early drinkers. Purple shadows were inching their steady way across the lawn, and the air was white and clean, not chokily colored by the Los Angeles smog. Kay was holding my hand, her eyes were closed, and her face was turned toward mine, each breath fanning my face, sweet in my nostrils.

Looking at her smooth, untroubled features, I couldn't help but wonder if she would be the woman who would look into my eyes as I lay on the deathbed. Well, if it turned out that way, she would never know that Varna had my last thought and prayer. Damn this love, sphinx-like in the great enigma it holds! Why—why in the name of chaos does this happen this way, with one person holding all the love along with an empty bag, and the other lying back, taking it all in with no effort?

Behind us footsteps rose and faded on the stone walk, preceded and followed by light talk, no-consequence chatter, conversation with an olive at one end and a martini at the other. All of them faded with the exception of one set which stopped, disrupting the continuity of the procession. I waited for it to continue, then turned, more out of curiosity than anything else.

If I just hadn't turned it would have been worth my last chance in hell, but why sob about it? There, staring at my face through the half-darkness, was my producer, fat Martin Moss, little god in sport clothes, the savior and the devil all wrapped up in himself. He smiled and made his uncertain way toward us.

"Hello, Martin, where's the missus?" I said tightly. Kay opened her eyes and frowned up uncertainly at him.

Moss shuddered. "For my good name, she'd better be in Miami. If she isn't, Lou will stir the brew in her nasty column." He peered toward Kay, wadded slightly and said, "Friend?"

Producers don't grow on trees, they just swing from them, so I nodded and winked, wanting to push his liquorish breath and filth back inside him.

His head bobbed unsteadily. "Sure, a man's gotta get away now and then, I'd go nuts if I didn't. Say, let's have a drink, come on inside. I've got a spot right in back where you can be alone. There's a door off the patio. C'mon!"

"Sorry, Martin, but we're going to bed." So help me, the words just slipped out!

He rocked back on his heels and roared. "Never knew you to be so frank, I 'pologize, you amaze me. I always thought you were a dead-pan hack writer, and here you turn up with a little . . ."

"Careful, Martin, watch that!" My face burned angrily.

"No offense, none at all," he said as he raised his hand in mock defense. His nails had been freshly manicured, and his body smelled of cologne. "Let me buy you a drink, old friends don't get together very often!"

Old friends? I hated his guts! Hack writer? That fat, sex-laden dog should have been in a hack heading for the cemetery. He had as much creative ability as one of his actors who mimic the words, ape the parts, make twice the money the writer does, and offer nothing in return but puking patronage. Hammish swine!

Kay was next to me, trembling like a leaf. She was afraid, and there was a deep fear welling up inside of me. It was the future reaching backward in time, warning us—warning us.

"Want a drink, dear?" I asked her.

She hesitated, then nodded and arose. Martin's eel-like eyes wound about her figure, then he led a weaving way through the French doors into a secluded part of the plush salon. He ordered three of his "special drinks," frothed-up green mixtures, tea-time, once-a-year drinks, said by lovers of the esoteric to have qualities of the aphrodisiac. I took one sip of the licorice-tasting thing and retched.

He had just taken a tiny sip and daintily lighted a perfumed cigarette when he leaned toward Kay, his eyes narrowing, and his

tongue licking softly at his fat mouth. His eyes bugged out, and he sank back.

"Well, kiss me quick, somebody, Miss Mermaid of Atlantis!"

Like an express elevator, my stomach dropped; emulating a cake of ice, my face froze into utter immobility, and my chest tightened. Steel bands of panic made breathing impossible, and I sat there, staring dumbly at him for at least a minute.

"You're mistaken, Martin, dead wrong. Meet Miss Boardwalk of 1947!" Kay's tender eyes sought mine, hurt and bewildered, but the stakes were high, and a woman's look didn't count.

"Come on now, Robbins, I've sat right under her pink little belly at the Atlantis Club. I don't give a damn, but just imagine sleeping with . . ."

He never got the words from his nasty mouth. I reached across the table, grabbed his lapels and twisted. I glared at him, raised my hand high and brought it down across his flabby face, feeling my palm ache at the impact. He gave a little screech and tried to struggle free.

"Listen, you sonofabitch!" I hissed. "You dirty bastard, say just one word about this, and I'll have your hide. You won't be worth a damn to anyone when I spread your reputation all over Hollywood. I know about you!"

I dropped him back and waited until he stopped wheezing; my own heart was pounding, pouring hatred through my body. His mouth was open, drooping idiotically, and saliva was falling on his jacket. To protect Kay's ears from what had to come, I moved into the chair by him, shuddering at his white, grubworm-like personality and feeling like throwing up everything I had eaten.

"How are Jackie Boy and Eddie?" I whispered into his ear. "Still love 'em like little brothers, still buy 'em dresses to wear when you're alone? How about the weed, still get 'em hopped up on it so you can have more fun? You filthy gut, if you say one word of this to a living soul, if you even think about it, I'll break you! You queer sonofabitch, you boy-loving bastard, if this gets out, you'll be sorry! I didn't trust you, had you trailed once, I've got pictures. I'll spread them all, over every rag in Hollywood. No, by God, I'm going to do it anyhow. Now get the hell back to your slimy, green rock!"

His face was drained of anything even subhuman. It was a fear-frozen mask, something from a century-old grave, a picture out of

the timeless past which carried only dull blankness and nothing of life. His body started jerking like an epileptic, his eyes rolled upward and became lost in their sockets, his fat tongue protruded, and he wiped an unsteady hand across a forehead suddenly deeply veined. He sighed, almost sobbingly, shoved back his chair and struggled up.

Before I could stop him, he had reached inside his jacket, withdrawn a small gun, raised it to his head and pulled the trigger.

Freeze the action, stop everything! Here is something you will never forget: the sight of a man about to die, five seconds from eternity, a roar, blood in flecks on the white cloth, eyes looking suddenly afraid, the dropping of a body, the smell of burned powder and death, a woman's scream and your own voice raised in a hoarse cry, silence, time contracting into one fear-filled moment—then flight.

Run—run—run, escape from the questioning! You've got a wife to keep and a life to save. Hurry across that lawn into your room, you must escape! Look at Kay whose face is tightening into the madness of hysteria, slap her hard, there and there, see the blood rush to her cheeks. Point to the bags, get them packed, not a minute from now—now! Work, slam things, clothes and memories into one container and snap the lock. Grab Kay's bag along with yours and beat it down the back way. No, don't look toward the room where he murdered himself, cut through this way between the cottages and down the driveway.

Voices in the background, excited, questioning, demanding; leave them behind and slow down, you're in front now. No cabs! Ah, the bus is swinging around the drive. Wait until the last passenger gets out and then approach the driver, tell him you have to make a train. Offer him a five, not too much. Join Kay whose face is relaxing into sanity and look at your hand marks on her scarlet cheeks. Hate yourself and touch them softly, but know that it was the only way.

The law edged into the train station just before me. I went to the cigar counter and bought a package of cigarettes, expecting at any moment to feel a hand on my collar. My back jerked nervously as I walked out, forcing my eyes from the huge hulk on the bench. Kay was waiting at the corner; I took her arm and made for the bus depot.

We stood deep in the shadows and looked through the plate-glass window. Yeah, Johnny Law was there too, standing with his hands clasped behind his back, even in his business suit as obvious as a sore thumb on the first violinist, as he surveyed the crowd. I whirled Kay about.

"Come on, we've got to beat it!" The nucleus of a mad idea formed in my brain.

"Where—how?" she pleaded.

"We're going to see Simpson. He might help us."

"After we won all that money and didn't go back?"

"We'll take the chance, it's the only thing left."

We walked to the alley beside the bus depot and down the dimly lighted cluttered way. We came to a high board fence, I looked about, carefully raised the bags above my head and shoved them across the top. They dropped silently, memories, wedding license and all into the darkness. I took Kay's hand, and we walked away.

"Now we go see Simpson. O.K., baby?"

"O.K., Billy. Anything you think best."

She remained at the bar, staring at her drink while I weaved my way through the gambling crowd, past the cashier's cage and slot machines, back to a door marked "Manager—Private."

Thirty seconds later I had talked my way



into Simpson's office, a barely furnished room that could have doubled for a monk's cell. He wasn't visibly surprised when he heard the story. He lighted a cigar and half swung away from me to study a picture on the far wall.

"Did you do it? I need the truth."

"Hell, no! I could pass a paraffin test right now. I haven't fired a gun since the war. Look, Simpson, they know it was suicide, but they want to talk with me—find out why I left so quickly."

"Then why don't you let them?"

"It can't be done, this is bigger than you can imagine. It means my neck if it gets out."

"She's someone's wife?"

"Hell, yes!" I shouted angrily. "She's all mine. Look, I can't take the publicity, it'd mean my end."

"Are you in pictures?"

"No, I'm just a hack writer who's afraid of losing his hide."

"Didn't you register at the hotel?"

"I was drunk that night and thought it would be cute to come in as Mr. and Mrs. J. Smith."

"I see. How much money do you have?"

"There's about five thousand in the safe at the Purple Swan," I said bitterly, thinking that he wasn't any different from anyone else. "I've got a couple of hundred and so has my wife."

Reaching into his desk, he withdrew an unopened pack of cards. "Gambling man, Mr. . . ?"

"Billy Robbins. Yeah, I'll play your game if there's a fighting chance."

"Break the deck and shuffle the cards while I verify your account at the Purple Swan."

Within a minute he had finished, and the Purple Swan knew where I was, but I knew that they would keep quiet about it. Simpson had the makings of a first-rate politician. He replaced the phone and turned back to me, his face a mask.

"I have a Forty-nine Oldsmobile convertible in back, right out this door. I'll cut you high card for it, five thousand dollars, or nothing. Will you play?"

I grinned tightly. "I've shuffled your cards, Simpson, give 'em a whirl. I'm happy to play."

His cigar was steady in the corner of his mouth as he shuffled them several times and spread them fanlike on the shiny glass surface.

"After you, ace high. Good luck, Robbins."

Blindly I swooped my hand down and grabbed a card from the desk, waiting until he drew one himself. We both turned our cards over and the sweat prickled on my forehead while I stared unbelievably.

"Your red four to my black four," he said, almost grinning. "We could do this for years and not have it happen again. I'll draw first this time."

With no show of emotion he reached out and turned over a Queen of Spades. My eight of Clubs wasn't even in the same league. I lighted a cigarette and waited with cradled hands while he wrote a bill of sale.

"The money is only to make it binding," he explained, handing me a hundred-dollar bill against my protests. "Good luck, Robbins!"

"Thanks, Simpson, I wouldn't be surprised if I needed all the luck in the world. If you ever come to Hollywood, look me up, there aren't too many cemeteries there. You might place a wreath on my grave. Good night!"

Five minutes later the road was a white ribbon stretching over the hills, superimposed against the black of the desert. The moon died in the clouds, and the headlights of the car stabbed toward the south. Kay's eyes were closed as we wheeled past the Purple Swan, and I didn't mention the black hearse that edged out of the drive. It wouldn't have made her feel any better, and

besides, there were too many black hearses waiting to play their final roles in our future.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Once again it was dawn; this time the sun was a dim ball hidden behind the low-settled cloud banks. The sky was dull and hung over the landscape like a tattered curtain, making the city a two-colored nightmare. Kay had been sleeping against my shoulder all the way from San Bernardino, and now as we sped along the freeway, she stirred, yawned, and stretched.

"Where are we, honey?"

"Almost home, baby. It won't be long now."

"Long till what?"

"Just a way of saying nothing," I shrugged.

"Hungry?"

"Guess I could eat. When did we do it last?"

"Eat?"

"Darling, you're as wanton as I am!"

"Environment, I told you. Do you want to stop at your place and get fixed up?"

"And just how do you mean that, Daddy?"

"Not that way. Good Lord, is your mind always one track? Get cleaned up, and I'll treat you to breakfast."

"Sure. Say, aren't you ashamed of keeping your little wife up all night?"

"Yeah, I'm crying! Live with me, and you'll see a lot of suns come up. Hold on, here we go!"

The tires screeched as we turned on Beachwood Drive and then Cheremoya, where we stopped underneath the overhanging trees in front of her place.

It all happened just as I reached across the car to open her door. Two men who wore felt hats and working clothes leaped from a gray coupé and sprinted toward us. My actions were purely automatic and stemmed from an awful desire to live: I slammed the door, floorboarded the throttle and half fell across her as the momentum of the car threw me sideways.

I pulled upright just in time to see one of them, a scrawny, sickly looking character carrying a pipe wrench loom up in front of the right fender. The tires howled, and the car rocked violently as I jerked away from him. There was a thump, and in the rear-view mirror I saw him fall to the ground and roll toward the curb, doubled over in pain. The other one, tall and all shoulders, stood screaming at me, his great fist beating the air futilely.

Half-expecting to see fear and horror on Kay's face, I looked at her as we lurched around the last curve and onto Beachwood Drive again. I was plenty surprised when she just screwed up her pretty face in a smile and said: "What's the matter, don't you like plumbers?"

"Love 'em, why?"

"Well, why'd you hit the little fellow with the wrench? He probably just wanted to fix your plumbing."

"Honey, when that little fellow got done with my plumbing, I wouldn't have been worth a damn to any woman, let alone you!"

"Who were they, Billy?"

"Private detectives. Marco wouldn't have the law out for his work."

"But . . . Oh, I get it, he's missed me!" she giggled. "Isn't that just like Tony? I'll bet he'll die when he finds out where we've been!"

He's not the only one who's going to die!

"He's not going to find out till we're ready to tell him, Kay. Don't forget, one man died to keep that secret."

She shuddered. "Please, I'm trying to for-

get him. It was horrible. I'll never get it out of my mind—the way he looked, and the smell!" She cuddled against me, thought a second, then said, "Billy, darling, aren't you worrying too much about this? Tony won't hold anything against me for marrying you."

"Just one thing, a .45 with a silver bullet, right smack against your pretty head. Feel flattered though, he only uses them on his very special enemies."

Her face turned a ghastly white. "He wouldn't. You don't know him like I do."

"Cut it out! I may be modern, but I don't like to hear how well my wife knows her ex-boy friend. Let's drop it!"

She curled against me like a warm little kitten. "I'm sorry, honey, I didn't mean it that way. I—we didn't, not very much, that is."

"All right!" I shouted, bitingly jealous. "I said to drop it!"

She bit her full lower lip and looked away, leaving me a million miles from her side and making me feel like a full-grown heel.

"Still hungry?" I asked, reaching over and patting her hand.

"I guess I could eat—whatever you want to do."

"Next to taking a plane to Asia, that'll have to do. Let's see what we can find."

After eating in a chromed-up place on Western that specialized in raw bacon and cremated eggs, we left for Laguna. The Pacific was slate gray as we passed the crest of the hill and looked down on the picturesque village which lay nestled in the coastal valley.

"Aren't we going to your place, Billy?"

"Not yet, I want to be sure the coast is clear. I'll leave you off in town."

Despite her begging pleas that she wanted to face everything with me and other such sobby stuff, I left her at a coffee shop and whirled back up the hill. No gray coupés were parked in front of the *Nine of Hearts*, and a filmy spider web across the gate showed that no one had visited me in the last hours. Cautiously I opened the gate, received splendid curses from the spider, and flung open the door, half-expecting to see Marco waiting in a chair, holding a gun and wearing a sadistic sneer on his cruel face.

No Marco, but like the ghost at the banquet he made himself known: several cards had been pushed under the door, all from Western Union and bemoaning the fact that a messenger had trudged up here in vain.

Kay was waiting outside the coffee shop and jumped into the car before it had stopped rocking. She lay against me, trembling violently.

"I never knew how much I loved you until you drove away. I almost died!" she whispered. "Don't ever leave me again. Promise!"

She lifted a tear-stained face, I gently wiped away the tears and kissed her soft trembling mouth. For several minutes I held her closely until she took strength.

"Want to take a little walk? Maybe you'll feel better."

"I don't care. Where do you want to go?"

"To the telegraph office. Tony boy was getting anxious," I said, showing her the cards.

She took a deep breath and lifted her haunted face to look at me. "Let's go see what Tony boy was getting anxious about," she said quietly.

We picked up the telegrams, ripped them open, and unconsciously drew closer together as each one became more vicious.

The first one was friendly enough.

September 7, 2:48 P.M. Arrived in Chicago. Had one for you. Send Kay's address. Regards.

Tony.

Number two was still all right.

September 8, 9:40 A.M. Getting things

settled. Out to have fun. How about Kay's address.

Tony.

He did better on the third one, becoming more like the Tony di Marco of yesteryear.

September 8, 11:10 P.M. Are you dead? Repeat. Are you dead? Want Kay's address. What gives?

Tony.

But number four did it, like a stinging whip across the face.

September 9, 2:00 P.M. Dead serious. Where is she? Do not advise crossing me. Do not like thieves. If broke wire collect. Marco.

I lighted a cigarette and smoked it jerkily until it burned my lips, then turned to Kay and said, "Want to go away?"

"Sure, as long as I have you, even to China."

"No place like that, at least not yet, but the climate in California is too hot for us."

"How about Mexico City?"

"Too far away. I want to be close by so we can get back in a hurry in case there happens to be a peace table to sit at, and yet far enough away so Marco won't find us."

"Maybe Catalina? The season should be over by now. I'll bet he'd check on obvious places like Havana or Miami."

"I like it. Catalina it is!"

You'll have to take me as is. Remember, you made me throw my trousseau away in Las Vegas. I've never seen a man like you—but I love you just the same. Life'll never be boring, honey."

"Taa-taa!" I trumpeted. "Life with Robbins. Will he make good his escape? And if he does, will Kay stick with him? Tune in at the same time . . ."

She stopped me with a long kiss that left no doubt. Sure, she'd stick with me, and we'd both probably end up by hanging on the highest mast of the biggest yacht in Avalon Harbor. Tony had a lot of friends who had a lot of yachts stolen from a lot of people who . . . Ad infinitum, tweedledee. It was a chance we had to take.

We drove up to the *Nine of Hearts* for a couple of bags and some clothes for me. Kay was brewing some coffee, and I had just entered the front room when it happened again.

The front door burst open, and Shoulders, the senior partner of the fink I had run down, rocketed in. He poised, hunched over, his shoulders moving slowly, and his arms dangling, ready to spring.

Before he saw me, I threw the largest bag with all my force and careened after it to meet him in the center of the room. He kicked the bag away and lunged at me. I sidestepped and brought up one clear from my guts. He swayed away, the blow landed on his cheek, and he swung around with his back momentarily toward me. I cocked my arm and threw a vicious left to his kidneys. He sank to the floor and rolled away, springing lithely up, unbelievably fast for a man his size.

He rushed for me, I ducked aside and took a blow on my temple that almost blinded me, grabbed for him and managed to throw his arms back and wrestle him to the floor. Kay screamed, ran to the kitchen door and there was just one flashing glimpse of her as we rolled across the floor. I pushed away from his grappling-hook arms and landed a short punch in his neck that made him grunt and curse obscenely. Bull-like, he shook his head as we both leaped to our feet. His mouth was moving slowly, twisted into a sadistic mask. His arms sagged for a second, there was an opening, and this time I threw caution to the winds, led with a jabbing left, at the

same time bringing my knee streaking toward his groin. The left rocked him back, but he grabbed my leg and jerked up. My head hit the coffee table as I flew backward—and there was no more.

Slowly, as from a great depth, I fought my way to the surface, consciousness returning unwanted like a stray animal. My head held ripping tornadoes and thundering horses; I was nauseated and swallowed back the sickness that came with my first breath, then weakly raised my hand to the aching thing that had been my head. Only when I felt Kay's cool hand on my forehead did full awareness rush toward me like an all-engulfing wave. I shoved the comforting hand away roughly and, after two attempts, managed to sit erect and stare across the room at my conqueror.

Gladiatorius Supremus stood leaning against the fireplace, plying his nails and watching me through heavy-lidded eyes. His hair was short and curly, his features coarse and despotic, and his face pock-marked. A cigarette dangled from his cruel mouth; the smoke drifted toward his flat, mishapen nose and curled about his head, making him look for all the world like one hell of a tough guy.

"Didn't they never tell ya not to get mad when you're fightin'?" he sneered. "Now take me, I always love th' man I'm whippin'. I could've kissed ya when I was lowerin' th' boom."

"Yeah, yeah, kiss me quick," I muttered, cradling my head and shoving Kay away when she started cooing over me. She looked hurt and to make her feel better, I said, "Cigarette!" She quickly lighted one and tenderly placed it between my lips. I leaned back and dragged hard on it.

"Ya know," Shoulders continued. "I could've liked ya, but my buddy's hurt bad, he's got his leg in a cast. I'm gonna have to whip ya when ya get up."

My eyes narrowed. "When I get up, Buster you're going to try to whip me. If I'd got my knee between your legs, you'd have still been out!"

He guffawed. "Sure, but I was too quick for you and tossed ya like a bag of beans." He threw the cigarette down and ground it into the carpet. "So you're Billy Robbins, huh?"

"My name, and you're working for Tony di Marco, Right?"

"He's th' boss, ya edicated pimpi!" He clasped his knife and strolled toward me, flexing his muscles. "Ya don't look like a bad guy. Yeah, I could've sorta liked ya. Shame, you're kinda young to die."

"Who says I'm going to die? Did Tony give you orders?"

"Me, orders? Hell, no, I've never seen him. Sides, I don't kill for no man. I make my wages by just softenin' 'em up."

"What's your charge?"

"Huh?"

"Name your price!"

"Hey, now, you tryin' to say I can be bought?"

"Exactly. Name it."

"I don't like that kind of palaver!"

"You've been seeing too many westerns. Come on, how much?"

He made a threatening move with his ham-like fist. "I don't sell!"

"Getting tired of working for a boss you haven't even seen?"

"Maybe, but that don't mean . . ."

"You said you could've liked me, maybe I need a bodyguard."

"Whatcha payin' your man?"

"Two-fifty a week for two months."

"How 'bout my buddy?"

"Well, how about him?"

"I took him to a hospital, it'll cost two bills to get him out!"

"You can buy a lot for two-fifty."

"No dice, you gotta pay the bill. God

damn ya, ya hit him!" he bellowed loudly.

"He got in the way, it's a cold world. O.K., tell you what, I'll pay for the hospital and throw in an extra bill for him. Buy it?"

"Three-fifty, and that cheap punk Marco is payin' . . ."

"Buy it, it's a good deal!"

"O.K., I'm your boy."

I sank back, suddenly worn out. "Get the bottle and three glasses, Kay. We'll sign after a drink."

Kay smiled weakly and left. Seconds later, she had rustled and clinked her way out of the kitchen, returning with the bourbon, ice cubes and soda. Shoulders licked his lips greedily and hunched his frame next to me. The divan sagged, and he leaned forward, watching Kay's pouring like a hungry tiger eyes its prey.

"Like yours neat, friend?" I asked my new employee.

He made a circle of his fingers. "Neat, reet, pleat. I don't want a bunch of swill goin' in my guts!"

He grabbed the glass from Kay, shoved it to his ugly mouth and drained it in two fast gulps. "Haw, haw!" he roared. "I guess there weren't no bottom in the fool glass." He winked at me and handed it back to Kay.

She smiled, poured him a double shot, then dropped ice cubes into our drinks. He was the essence of decorum this time and waited until we sat with poised glasses.

"I gotta toast!" he yelled. "I know a girl what lives on a hill. She won't do it but her sister will. Let's drink to her sister!"

He tilted the glass, closed his eyes and gulped. Kay's eyes narrowed, and her mouth thinned; with cobra swiftness she grabbed the bottle by the neck and brought it crashing against his head. He dumbly opened his mouth, his eyes rolled protestingly toward heaven, and he slumped to the floor.

Kay looked at him contemptuously and nudged him with her little foot. "Filthy gut!" she snarled, then seemed to forget him as she studied the label on the bottle.

"Kay!" I protested, rising and disarming her. "Didn't you ever learn the rules of civilized warfare? We were at a conference table and an armistice had been arranged. I'm truly ashamed of you!"

"Really, Billy?" she asked.

"Taking her face in my hands, I said, 'So much ashamed that I can hardly be more proud. But wh'd you do it?'"

"You couldn't have bought him that cheap."

Billy."

"What do you mean?"

"He'd have taken everything, then gone back to Marco."

"I know that, kid, but I was just stalling for time. Well, anyway, you snapped us out of the stall and here we are with an unconscious fink on our hands. Let's have that drink."

We had several, making unfavorable comments on Shoulders' ancestry, morals and probable offspring. His presence gradually faded away, and we sat close to each other until her presence became suddenly very active and acute.

"Kiss me, Billy, hard!"

I rolled Shoulders over with my foot and took her in my arms. Our unmasked eyes were smoldering, when the phone's death ring echoed throughout the house. Kay leaped to her feet, fear showing in her face like a vivid make-up.

"Have another drink. I'm just beginning to feel good," I said.

"What'll you do if it's Marco?" she whispered.

"I may be yellow at times, but I'm not ashamed of being married to you. I'll tell him the truth—God help me," I added under my breath.

I walked to the bedroom and sat on the

bed, eyeing the phone which was suddenly alive. It took my nervous hands seconds to reach for the phone, but the wait was worth it. Yeah, just like death.

"Hello—Billy Robbins."

"God damn it to hell, where in the name of Christ have you and Kay been? Talk, and fast!" Marco roared.

"Can you hear me, Marco, good and clear?" I asked softly.

Hell, yes, I can hear you. Damn you, Robbins. I want to know!"

"Hold onto your crucifix, this'll get you!"

"Tell me, you sonofabitch!" he bellowed.

"Listen, you bastard, no man calls me that and gets by with it!" I screamed. "When I see you, I'll cut your throat and throw you to the dogs, you murdering pig! All right, I'll tell you exactly where I've been. I've been to London to see the queen, then I went to Las Vegas and married Kay. How do you like that, you olive-skinned son of Napoli?"

"You—married Kay?" he rasped unbelievingly.

"That's right, you blithering slob. I married Kay, and I'm damned well proud of it."

"You shouldn't oughta done that, Robbins."

"Yeah?" I roared. "And what's Mama di Marco's little baby Tony gonna do, bust out crying?" I turned away, suddenly thirsty. "Kay, bring me my drink!"

"Is Kay there?" His voice was low and sinister.

"Mrs. Robbins is here, yes, but not to you."

"Robbins . . ." he almost whispered.

"Yeah, what now, Marco?" I grinned into the phone.

"I'm gonna kill you, so help me Christ. If it takes me the rest of my life and every cent I got, I'll do it. I'll string you up and I'll slice you to pieces and rip your guts out. When I get through with you, no woman in the world will want you!"

"All right!" I yelled back, "you filthy pig, you do that, and I'll go back to Hollywood and make a fortune. The boys will simply love me. Good-by!"

Kay was standing in front of me, her eyes all starry-like, and her face proud. "I'm proud of you honey, awful proud of the way you spoke up to him."

"Talk's cheap, Kay, especially when he's in Chicago, and I'm here."

She dropped to the bed and threw her arms about me tightly. "You'd have done the same thing if he'd been right here. I just know it!"

"Maybe so. I'm so used to writing the scripts and having the endings come out my way that I might've forgotten that Marco's got the blue pencil."

"What did he say?"

" . . . Always swore I'd never lie to my wife, and damned if I will now. He said he would kill me."

She lay back on the bed, her breasts rising hard against the thin dress. "He meant it," she whispered. "I'm getting a lot of answers about him that I never had the nerve to look for."

"He plays for keeps, Kay, and always winds up with the marbles."

"What'll we do now?"

"I'm not the running type, but there's no point in staying here and adding two more names to his glory list. We'll go to Catalina as we planned."

She pulled me down and crept into my arms. "I love you, Billy, and I'm sorry I got you into this awful mess. I didn't have to, but golly, I sure loved you!"

"Well, you got me, baby, annuities and all. That's life. Let's go see what Shoulders is doing, maybe he's bled to death by now."

We dragged him to the patio, and his seat was pretty well worn-out when we dumped him in the rock garden. He probably cursed like blazes when he came to, because the bottle he had cradled in his arms was empty.

CHAPTER TWELVE

As we pulled onto the winding coast highway, leaving the *Nine of Hearts*, the sky dropped leadenly, stifling life and laughter. We were both silent, wrapped up in private thoughts, and when we pulled into Newport Beach half an hour later, not more than a dozen words had been said. I left the car in a garage and took Kay to a malt shop, then went to the pay phone lugging along a fistful of silver.

"Good morning, Blake-Jenkins."

"Hello, Betty, this is Billy Robbins. Is the big man in?"

"Mr. Robbins, where've you been? Mr. Blake's been raging around here like mad!"

"I'll report later, honey. Right now I've got to talk with Daddy. Is he still rational?"

"He's awful upset, I'll connect you. Have a good time!"

"Sure, but got an aching head out of the party."

She laughed, and a second later connected me with Alan Blake, suave and purple-jowled, well-fed, yet hungry-looking, as well-placed in life as an olive in a martini.

"Blake speaking."

"Billy Robbins, Mr. Blake. I came back."

"Well, could you make it? I hope you didn't put yourself out. We could have waited a few months more," he said acidly. "Sorry, Mr. Blake, it came up all of a sudden."

"Where the devil have you been? We needed you badly!" he shouted.

"I got married, nice girl, blonde and pretty."

"Married! Couldn't you have waited? Oh, well, congratulations," he added grudgingly.

"Now come on down, I need you. No, better yet, get over to the studio."

"Do you really need me there? I'm doing some writing, a scenario, a beautiful love story, dramatic as all outside."

"You're not only writing a story, Billy, you're living one. I can see *Variety* and the *Hollywood Reporter* now: 'ROBBINS REINS TERROR TALES!'"

"I'm just a writer, I'm a bit short on that theatre lingo. What does it mean?"

"Haven't you heard about Martin Moss?"

The hair on my neck bristled, and my insides got cold. "No, did he have an accident?"

"Accident!" he screamed. "Mother of . . . Where've you been? He blew them all out, what few he had, in Las Vegas!"

"Martin, a suicide!" I gasped. "I can't believe it! He was so loved. Yes, that's the word, everyone loved him."

"Robbins, he was a slob, and you know it. He was hired to direct the show only because his wife was first cousin to Alice Gundry who is Mrs. Major Stockholder of Spendless Drugs, and you know it."

"Mr. Blake, you cut me, I always thought . . ."

"Exactly what the rest of us did," he interrupted. "Robbins, how would you like to direct the show along with writing it?"

"You mean me!"

"Not your wife. Meet me here after rehearsal, and we'll talk it over."

That was great! Here they were handing me a ladder along with a boost. I was on my way up without having to cut anyone's throat, yeah, there was the ladder, all gold-plated, and at the top was a man named Antonio di Marco, waiting for me with his own private army, consisting of a .45, two huge hands curled just right for my neck, and a burning hatred ready-made for death. *Death on the Ladder*. Nice name for another "Terror Tales." What a deal, reshuffle the deck. I don't like my hand.

"Believe me, Mr. Blake, it's the one thing I'd like to do, but I can't."

"What?" he roared. "You can't take a jump from two-fifty writer to a four hundred combo writer-director? You're mad. Here you cry for months about poor direction, don't deny it, things get back to me. You moan all over town about Moss, then when I offer you a chance like this, you say you can't. Listen, mad dog, any writer on the networks would jump at this!"

"Mr. Blake," I said weakly, "the offer means more to me than I can tell you, but it isn't for me."

"You goddamned writers! I don't know why I put up with you. All right, forget about it, I'll get Collins from Allied Artists. He'll jump at it like a hungry dog."

"If it had been last month, I'd have barked like the devil, but the dog catcher's on the prowl. Listen, boss, there's someone looking for me."

"The man with the white coat, probably," he muttered.

"Uh-uh, a man with a sport coat, a loaded gun, and no love for me. He's out for my neck, and if I took the job, he'd get it. Look, I'm doing you a favor, you can't go around hiring directors every day. Pretty soon people would run when you walked down the street."

"That bad, Billy?"

"That bad, Mr. Blake. I hope you understand."

"I guess I can work at it. What about the scripts?"

I counted on my fingers, thought fast, then said, "I'm four weeks ahead now."

"Three weeks, they're rehearsing right now for tonight's show."

"Yeah, I'd forgotten. Anyway, how about my farming out 'Terror Tales' for a few weeks till this blows over?"

"Do you have anyone in mind?"

"Do you remember Jack Greig?"

"Lord, yes. You mean he's free-lancing now?"

"When he can get a show, you know how it is. You remember the 'Speaking Corpse' series. He directed that."

"Until he hit the bottle a little too much."

"Don't be too hard on him, all he needs is another chance. He hasn't been the same since she left him."

"Yes, I know about it, the little slut. By the way, the word's about town that they're dropping her option. She's on the way down, probably be back at her old trade soon, charging ten dollars instead of two."

Well, how about giving him a try? It'd make me feel good to know that he's on his way up again when she's coming down."

"Do you know what our Hooper is? It's nine-five, which is damned good for our type of show. I wouldn't want it to take a drop."

"Just a chance, Mr. Blake!" I pleaded.

"Let him sit in on a rehearsal and get the feel, have him write one, then decide. Look, he's only drinking because he's not needed by anyone, not even himself."

"Lord, boy, you're not in love with him, are you?"

"He's a good friend. When I hit this town he helped line me up. Hell, if it hadn't been for him, I'd never have met Larry Sniedley, got the fast shuffle, and wound up working for the fast."

"Uh-huh, I'd have been crying yet. All right, give Greig the word, tell him to write me a couple of typicals, and I'll look them over. If they're good, damned good, I'll use him."

"Thanks, Mr. Blake, and I'll keep in touch with you."

"You won't be in even for the show?"

"Want my grubby little soul on your hands?"

"God, no! Get out of town until you can

come back and take over. Say, what's this fellow's name?"

"Tony di Marco," I told him, hating the sound of the words.

He whistled softly. "Good luck, Billy. If there's a God may he walk hand in hand with you, you'll need him. So you're the one!"

"What do you mean, is there a price on my head?"

The words out that Marco's looking for a writer, but I didn't dream you were the boy, it's all pretty hush-hush. We got several calls for you, but referred them to your apartment. I heard at Schwabs that he's got three private detective agencies looking for—the writer. Not only that, but a big wheel at headquarters is working on it. I got this from a friend of a friend of mine who knows a sergeant on the Vice Squad. They're out to get you, Billy. Marco swears he'll nail you to a cross!"

"Thanks for the information, Mr. Blaike. I'm going to drop dead now."

"Billy! You're not going to pull a Martin Moss on me, are you?"

"Uh-uh, I wouldn't miss this show for the world. I'm going on stage now to set the scene for Marco. He'll be getting his cue shortly. Good-by, and thanks!"

After a malt with Kay, I managed to get in touch with Jack Greig. He was fairly sober and quietly grateful when he got the story.

"I'll never take another drink, Billy. You've got my promise."

That was all he said, and I turned away from the phone, breathing a silent prayer for him. Kay had been waiting patiently for me; there was a steaming cup of coffee in front of my place. I quietly thanked God for my silent little wife, who had the decency to let me bury the maggoty corpse of my prior life in quiet peace.

In time with my morbid thoughts, I slowly finished the coffee while Kay sat, staring moodily from the window. For the third time that day, I mentally wrote a scene for Marco, Kay and me, and as each one became more life-like and grim, I realized that my subconscious was desperately warning me, urging flight, telling me that the inevitable was nearing, the chase, the terrifying moment of the catch, and the kill. Marco had cornered us in my thoughts, in a blind alley filled with stinking garbage and the unmistakable odor of death. His deeply set eyes were boring into mine as he advanced, half crouching, slowly, slowly. The garbage faded away, leaving nothing but the overpowering smell of death.

"When will we leave, Billy?" Kay asked, turning to me.

I almost screamed as her voice stabbed into the awake-dream. The death scene scuttled back into the darkest corner of my mind.

"Can't leave till we get money, lots of it," I muttered.

"I have a little, about two hundred."

"The way we live, that wouldn't last a week. We need big money."

"What'll we do?"

"Cash Marco's check?" The thought slammed me back in the booth.

"I'd forgotten about that. Do you think it's right?"

"Don't get me wrong, we're not stealing it. He'll get his story, one that will set him back on his ear, if he wants it. If he doesn't, I'll buy it back for ten thousand dollars—when I get it."

For the thirty minutes it took to clear the check and make identification, neither of us breathed more than once. If Marco had thought to stop payment, we would be sunk before we had launched our little ship of futile dreams. But he hadn't, and we walked out with our ill-gotten gains, ten thousand dollars worth of life. We were sitting pretty all right, yeah, just like a couple of clay pigeons.

We must have made a dreary-looking couple as we walked down the Newport Beach road, hand in hand, carrying a couple of small bags: two beat-up world travelers, looking for a home. We turned right on the coast highway until we came to what looked promising, a likely place on the bay, an ancient water-fronting row of sheds that some-one years ago had called Holly's Boat Landing.

We edged down the steep ramp and stood looking over the skeleton fleet of dead ships, wrapped up in their funeral garbs of canvas. I scanned down the motley line until at the far end I saw a trim, twenty-five foot sloop which was riding almost gaily in the gentle swells. Her sails were hoisted, and she appeared to be ready for action; we hurried along the dock, and as we neared the boat, Paula appeared dashing across the stern. Through the crisp air the fragrant aroma of brewing coffee and snatches of some French song drifted up from the galley.

"Aho, Paula, anyone aboard?" I called.

The song ended abruptly on a high, risqué beddy-bye note, and a second later a mop of black hair popped into sight. A pair of dark brooding eyes were followed by an English mustache, a muscle-bound T shirt, and finally by a pair of faded jeans.

"Are you the skipper?"

"That's right, help you?"

"That depends on you. May we come aboard?"

"Business or pleasure?"

"That depends on you, too."

He hesitated, and a look of interest followed by what might have passed for compassion flitted across his morose features. "Come below. Just follow me."

We went below, introduced ourselves as Mr. and Mrs. Billy Jones, then got around some of the strongest and best coffee ever tasted by mortal lips. He was a startling character, this J. Ronald Briggs, but at least he knew what to do with the coffee bean. When we shoved our empty mugs toward the center of the table, he raised his brooding eyes and waited.

Do you ever charter the Paula, Captain Briggs?" I asked him.

"I've been known to," he answered quietly.

"We want to take a sail."

"I figured you did, or you wouldn't have come aboard. Go on."

The guy wasn't helping a bit.

"Where do you want to go? We've got a nice trip for the moon leaving at four bells."

He was nuts, cut it anyway you want to!

"Too far away," I muttered, half-angrily.

"We'll settle for just two things, a trip to Catalina, and a quiet skipper, one who has a poor memory." I opened my wallet and let a hundred-dollar bill peek out at him coyly. "What's your charge?"

"Did I say I would take you?"

"Sorry, guess I used the wrong approach. If you had said you would do it, how much would it cost us?"

This time he grinned, but with his mouth. His eyes hadn't lighted up since we came aboard.

"Does ten thousand dollars seem out of line?"

"Ten thousand!" I yelled, taking Kay's arm to leave. "Come on, honey, let's get out of this mad house. Why don't you just ask for my life's blood, Briggs?"

"Money won't do you any good if you stay here—Mr. Robbins."

Kay's arm stiffened, and she screamed. My heart shot the works, and my body was suddenly cold.

"A detective came in here yesterday. I didn't like him, he came below without knocking, and I was doing something pretty personal," he said, pointing to the head.

"Guess what he wanted? You and your wife. He's waiting to pay me ten thousand dollars

if I turn you in! Ten thousand dollars!"

"Can you collect it, Briggs?" I asked, leaning forward, my hand a tight fist on the bare table.

"I suppose I could, there's a German Luger in this drawer, and I learned Judo from my dad's Japanese gardener." His hand almost casually went into the drawer, brought out the pistol, fondled it and then tossed it on the bunk. He reached behind a pillow and brought out a bottle of Scotch, uncorked it and half-filled the three coffee mugs.

"But I don't know if I will. The money's peanuts for what I've turned down in my time," he said, swirling the whisky in the mug and studying its eccentric eddies. "I could have made a fortune smuggling Chinese on the Paula. I wasn't against that so much as I was against the idea of having them chained at the loose end of my anchor. I used to pick up stray dogs off the street when I was a kid, too."

"Sorry, Briggs," I mumbled. "Shouldn't have acted that way, but do you have any idea how it feels to be running?"

"I've been running from my past for years, Robbins, and it turns up in every port I reach and sits on the dock waiting for me. Bitter memories are a lot worse than any hopped-up thug you can show me."

"Say that again, as long as that thug doesn't want to kill you. Well, what about it?"

"Oh," he said absently. "Do you happen to have any whisky?"

"None in my hat, but I guess it could be arranged. Scotch?"

"Is there another kind?"

Kay sank back and stared unbelievably. "You mean that's all you'll charge us?"

"I wouldn't have the guts to, pardon me, charge you anything else. Forget about it, the drinks are on me. There's a full case forward, and you can pay your way over by being official bartender of the Paula."

"How about me, J. Ronald?"

"Now that's a good question, darned if I know. I guess Kay and I will just have to take you along as ballast. Let's shove off."

Half an hour later we had left the harbor and were bucking the open sea. By sunset we had lazed our drinking way across the channel and anchored in Avalon Harbor. The dinghy's alcoholic path through the harbor was a sinuous snake, but we made it with our voices raised in songs our mothers never taught us. When we reached our weaving way ashore, Kay was between us, cradling a bottle in her arms and cooing something like "Ud de bub" to it. It didn't make a lot of sense, but neither did anything else; we were in a rosy land of liquor, composed of onrushing bravado and rapidly diminishing fear. Not until I suddenly had the inspiration to dash to a phone and call Marco, telling him where we were and daring him to try to get us, did I realize just how drunk we were.

"We're tight, all three of us!" I said, stopping them.

Billy, honey-bunny!" Kay protested. "For th' first time I'm forgettin'. Don't be a kill-joy, boy, let's have fun. Right, J. Ronald?"

"Right, Kaysie-waysie," he grinned. "Look, man, we're on th' moon, luna, dreams made of green cheese and honey. Pass the bottle, Kaysie!"

I grabbed the bottle from Kay and held it behind my back. "Yeah, made of corpses, too. Look, I feel like drinkin' to the end o' time, just like you do, but let's make it our time, not our end. Kay, your hair!"

She frowned unhappily. "Don'tcha like it, Billy? It's all for you, every li'l curl!"

"Sure, I do, but it's blonde 'nd things. It might as well be a blinkin' sign that says, 'I'm Kay Robbins!' Don't forget Marco, he's got connections from here to hell, and someone is liable to spot us."

"Oh, yeah, yeah, I'll fix that right up."

She whipped a large, gay scarf from her bag and wrapped it turbanlike about her blonde curls, then raised her lips to mine and kissed me hard. "There, how's that, lover boy?" "It looks great, like a long life. O.K., let's go. 'We who are about to die . . .'" "In the presence of death, salute you!" Briggs roared. "Onward to Avalon!"

That was the last clear memory of the evening. The next morning I awoke, feeling close to Death, as in capital "D," still dressed and lying slumped in a chair. Across the room, Kay was huddled on the bed, holding a pillow tightly against her breast. I squinted around the room, looking for J. Ronald. He was gone, but on the chair was a note: I was too weak to give one good damn about it and fell asleep with a great sigh.

It was early afternoon when we both awoke. Kay joined me in the shower and amid wet kisses and stingingly cold spray, we managed to partially recuperate.

J. Ronald had returned to Newport and said in his note that if we really wanted to go to some damned-fool moon, he'd sail for us, with or against the tide. And may all the gods of darkness bless us.

My life, composed of mornings on the beaches, afternoons in the bars, and evenings in demanding arms began to pale after the first week, and once again my writing called. Kay, now a sedate redhead, stayed close to the cabin during the day, resting, staring moodily from the window, sighing resignedly at my typing, and then returning to her reading.

But there wasn't much real writing done. When it wasn't this and that, it was feeding time for Kay's insatiable appetite. Sex may be fun, taken as a fine drink or *apéritif*, but not as steak and potatoes with every meal.

But all in all we got along pretty well: I kept in touch with the agency, ignoring all calls until the one that I had most feared and yet most desired, arrived.

Varna had called the agency and left a number!

Two minutes later I was talking to that still dear and warm voice that I remembered so well even after all these tears.

"Varna, this is Billy."

"Billy!" Her voice was close, clinging and very dear.

"I heard you wanted to talk with me," I said cautiously.

"Yes. Are you all right, you and Kay?"

"Sure, fine and dandy, having a whale of a time."

"I've been so worried, Billy. Marco . . ."

"How is he, even-tempered and loving as ever?"

"He's like a devil; he is insane with rage. I've never seen anyone like him. He hates you from the second he gets up until he falls to sleep in a drunken stupor."

"He's taken to the bottle? Not our Marco. he's stronger than that."

"Billy, he cared very much for Kay until you . . ."

"Until I took her from him, huh?"

"Yes, until then, and now he hates her."

"It wouldn't have happened if you hadn't written that letter."

"Oh," her voice caught. "The letter."

"You express it better than I could in a thousand words. Yes! The letter."

"Can't you understand? I was so afraid. When I awoke from the spell of it all, I was terrified!"

"Terrified of love?"

"Of your someday hating me for bearing you a half-breed."

"Good Lord!" I screamed. "Was that it? Didn't you know that I'm the result of interbreeding? My father was English, and my mother was half-French, and for all I know, part Ubangi. What the hell do you suppose that makes me?"

"You don't understand me," she whis-



pered, half-sobbing. "From the first day I walked from the house and toddled down Via Roma in Naples, I was 'Chinked' and 'Japped.' All my life I have been treated as an outcast, wanted by no one, regarded by all the world as some sort of freak. I never knew any peace, and I don't want my children to go through that."

Varna, do you love me?" I asked softly.

It was a long minute before she answered. "Do you have the right to ask me that?"

"Maybe not, but did you have the right to tear out my heart? Get this: I'd never known what love was until you came along, but I fell, Lord, how I fell! They heard the thump clear over there in Naples. Listen and don't forget, you were the only woman I ever wanted. I love you, Varna. I love your proud look, the smile on your face, everything about you."

"Billy!" she sobbed. "Why didn't you come and tell me that, make me unafraid? Why didn't you . . ." She broke down sobbing, and her tears reached into the phone and flew through space to me.

I blinked back my own, then said, "Because I got drunk one night, and when I woke up, I was in bed with Kay, all married up, nice and legal. That's why, along with the reason that I've seen too many men crawl back to women and get their faces kicked in."

"I'm sorry, Billy. You'll never know how sorry I am."

"That helps a lot, except for the fact that I've got a wife now."

"Kay must love you a lot."

"I guess so, I wouldn't know. I've just got a front seat in the biggest farce of my life, married to one woman, mad about another, and running from a jealous Italian."

"I wish desperately that I could help you."

"Maybe you can—a little."

"How? Anything at all?"

"Just tell me if you really love me, Varna."

"I—how can I tell you that? I didn't know you long enough."

"Do you love me? I knew you forever and loved you before time started. You were in my mind from the second the world began and will be with me until it's all over. You can't answer me like that, nor can you make me believe that I was alone in my feelings that night. Varna, do you love me?"

"I—yes, Billy, so very much! I do, I do."

My eyes closed in silent thankfulness, and for the first time since we parted I felt alive. "Varna, that helps more than anything you could say. Thank you."

" . . . Billy!" she breathed.

"Yes, Varna. I love that name, where did they get it?"

"Wait. Now you must promise to help me."

"Do you want me to climb a thousand mountains, swim a dozen oceans?"

"No, Billy, I just want you to go away and never return."

"I'm tired of running, Varna. A man can't do it forever, after while he looks inside his mind and hates the sight."

"Billy!" she pleaded. "If you love me, care at all for what I want, leave now. If you could just look into Marco's eyes, you would understand. They're inhuman and hateful, like a great animal's. They have death inside. Your death, my dear."

"Sure, I know," I said soothingly. "I'll be right careful. Now I've got to go back to Kay, she's probably hungry again. I'll be calling you later."

"No, not that!" she said hastily. "Marco might find you some way, and I wouldn't want it to be through me. Please look out for yourself—and Kay, of course."

"I'll watch over her like a hawk. Good night, Varna."

"Good night, Billy. I will see you—some day."

The next day, Kay was dead.

Murdered by Marco.

And I ran wildly away, across the brush, through dry canyons into the back land, deep into the heart of the island. By day I hid in deserted gullies, and caves, and at night blindly stumbled my fear-maddened way farther and deeper into the island, my mind a disjointed thing, set mad by the sight of Marco over Kay's body.

On what may have been the second day, I fell unconscious in a wild canyon, my body eaten by a deep fever, my mind wildly seeking permanent escape from my body. Many suns rose and beat me unmercifully before the mountains turned deep purple and soft night came. Animals howled about me and night birds screeched overhead, their sounds filtering through to my fevered brain as distant, yet fearful things. Several times I thought that I heard voices, but I was never sure, for they came and receded like the

waves of the sea and were awful, demanding things, screaming my name.

The stars were pale in the eastern sky when I awoke after a long sleep that had started in the cool of the afternoon. For the first time in days, my mind was lucidly clear, my thoughts unfettered by chains of fever. Slowly, the events of the previous week lined themselves in front of me, then marched before my mind like precise figures in a logical sequence.

My eyes looked unceasingly toward the growing dawn, and I saw myself walk from the village to our cabin, cross the street, open the gate and start for the rear door. As I passed the bedroom I looked in, then froze into complete immobility at the sight, totally unable to function as a human.

Kay's back was over the foot of the bed, and she was dangling grotesquely like a broken doll in Marco's mad, shaking grasp. His huge hands were about her slender neck, and his mad face was next to hers. His mouth had twisted itself out of any resemblance of sanity; it was drooping open and saliva was falling from it onto Kay's naked breast. She was completely nude, except for the long stockings that clung to her marble thighs. Great, sobbing welts and scratches marred the entire length of her body which lay dead in Marco's arms. Her glazed eyes were fear-stricken things out of a nightmare that looked beyond her murderer into the unknown future.

Marco picked her up as if she were a toy, held her at arm's length with one great paw, drew back the other and delivered a crushing blow to her dead, impassive face. He picked her high above his head until her breasts were cruelly scraped on the stuccoed ceiling, snarled and threw her across the room. Her body slammed against the wall, fell to the dressing table, knocking the small cologne and perfume bottles to the floor, then sank in a quiet little heap to the carpet, face down.

He walked to her, raised his foot and twisted it on her back with all his brute force, then spat. His face was more evil than could be told, and he was more of a devil than all of the wizards from the beginning of time could have conjured up.

He turned and saw me. His mouth moved snarlingly, he roared like a mad animal, kicked a chair from his route, leaped toward the window, raised his foot and kicked the glass from the frame. Only when the slivers fell about me and tinkled a mad tune in my ears did my senses return. I wheeled about and ran madly from the yard, across the road, vaulted a tall stone fence and scrambled through the underbrush.

I stumbled and ran my blind, falling way into the canyon, finally reaching the bottom a bleeding mess, torn and bruised, half-unconscious. From behind a bush I looked carefully up. Marco was standing high above, helpless in impotent rage, his hands moving slowly, searchingly. As an animal scuttled past me, I half mumbled a scream and leaped to my feet.

My eyes followed the squirrel, then slowly, fearfully raised to the top of the canyon. Marco roared and leaped down into the deepness after me. I wheeled about and ran for my life, losing his hoarse cries in the loud panting of my tortured lungs.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The vividly painted memories of the chase slowly faded, and my eyes again closed in a deep sleep from which there was no awakening until the noonday sun fell on my upturned face. A horrible thirst, indescribable in its demanding urgency, was scraping my

throat raw, and a terrific hunger like I had not known since the thirties dug its gnarled fingers into my stomach.

Somehow I managed to arise and stood weaving on a pair of legs that were as tired as two overstretched rubber bands. For more than an hour I picked my way up the canyon, finally collapsing under a scrub tree. My sight bleared as I searched the upper horizon, then snapped clear of fog as a thin cloud of chimney smoke trailed its nebulous way aloft. With a disbeliever's prayer stuck in my throat, I clawed my way up the bushy, nearly vertical sides of the canyon. Over the projecting rocks and bushes my legs pushed me; my fingers pulled at their roots and dug into the dirt as I yanked my way upward to food: monstrous stacks of pancakes, thick slices of ham, and dozens of eggs over lightly.

At the crest I lay in a clump of bushes, sick from the sudden exertion, but my mind lucid on one point: I had to get to the house, take it by storm if necessary. It was a single-story, frame house, badly in need of some more white paint. In the dirt driveway was an ancient automobile, the kind you see occasionally with the spare tire mounted behind the trunk. A grinning man sauntered from the house, the screen banging behind him, climbed into the car and fussed with the controls. There was a backfire, a cloud of exhaust smoke, and finally the rocking car settled down to mere noise. Like a bunch of small firecrackers exploding, four or five kids popped from the house and streaked for the car, followed by a smiling woman and a bounding dog. Before my numbed eyes could follow the rapid sequence, they had all piled into the car and were away for Avalon in a cloud of dust.

Five minutes later, I was staggering onto the porch, the half-dozen steps great obstacles that my aching legs barely surmounted. In another two minutes I was inside the house, via the front window.

Everything cold in the icebox fell prey to my great void, and when the last gulping mouthful was down, I started half a dozen eggs and four strips of bacon working in the iron skillet. After getting sick and losing it all, I settled for a glass of warm milk and headed for the bathroom.

The reflection in the mirror made me sick with fright; I half swung at it before the sunken eyes, four-day growth of beard, taut skin that belonged on a freshly baked turkey all reflected in twisted fear. God! Could I be this man?

The relaxing bath that drained the tiredness from my body, and the pride-restoring shave made me more of a new man than could have any fine group of well-meaning psalm singers. I dressed and returned to the front of the house. The room was shabbily furnished, a worn divan whose cushions were almost nonexistent, a big chair and re-covered foot stool, three straight chairs, one rocker with its wicker shot to hell, and a kid's chair was all the furniture with the exception of a living room table which held a Bible and a newspaper.

My hands were shaking as I grabbed the paper and smoothed it out on the table. On the front page was the story, *our story*, the biggest thing in my life. They had photographed our cottage, using an artist's sketch of the interior to show the route Marco had used through the rear porch and into the bedroom where he had murdered Kay. They used our assumed names, Mr. and Mrs. William Jones, young couple, devoted to each other, never apart. The local reporter had turned it into a field day, throwing his fertile adjectives throughout the article like pollen in a spring breeze. Brutal murder—ravishing auburn-tressed beauty—hulking figure seen to vault from the shattered window—wild

backyard chase of terrified husband (yellow dog—the parentheses are mine), apelike murderer, standing on the edge of the canyon, then diving into it in hot pursuit—police and Coast Guard alerted for immediate action—husband still missing, believed to be second victim of foul play—body of girl in morgue, pending inquest.

Laying the paper back, I walked across the room and sank into the big chair, tossing my feet on pop's foot stool. For the first time in days, my mind started to seek a plan of action, slowly plotting, discarding and picking up the pieces to re-form them until the plan slowly evolved, and I arose to search for the telephone.

"Billy, what the devil are you doing in Catalina?" Jack Greig asked.

"What do you do, read minds for a hobby, Jack?"

"I got the news when I accepted phone charges. How are you, son?"

"Fine, pappy. Listen hard, I want you to do me a big favor."

"Anything at all, Billy. You name it."

"You asked for it. Go to the Mexican consul and get me a tourist card in your name."

"In my name! Sure, but what good will that do you?"

"Don't worry, I can use it, and they won't ask too many questions. Just take along your birth certificate and tell 'em you're gonna spend a few American dollars."

"All right, then what?"

"Then drive to Newport Beach, it might be a good idea to be sure you're not being followed, and take it to a place called 'Holly's Boat Landing' on the coast highway just south of the overpass. You'll find the *Paula* anchored there—I hope. Give it to the skipper, and no one else."

"The *Paula*, got it."

"Tell him, his name is Briggs, by the way, to bring it to Catalina and meet me at the isthmus tomorrow night at eight o'clock. After that, you don't know a thing, you lost the card and changed your mind."

"Do you have any money?" he asked anxiously.

"Sure, I'm loaded, managed to carry Fort Knox away from the wreckage of the Good Ship Robbins. So long, and thanks a lot. Hey! How does Blake like your stuff?"

"Fine, I guess. He's signed me on a week-to-week basis for the rest of the option period. He says we'll talk permanent then, until you return. Hurry back, we all miss you."

"Thanks, Jack. I hoped you'd give me a hand. I needed it."

"Need anything else?"

"That's enough, I feel like I'm stealing your birthright as it is."

"What's happened, boy? The word's out that you're marked for slaughter. Weren't there enough girls without taking Tony di Marco's?"

"Sure, plenty, but we made such beautiful music together that I just had to write a symphony with her. 'By, pappy, see you some day.'"

I left the good family two hundred-dollar bills and an unwritten prayer that they'd spend it for new furniture, grabbed some food, and struck off toward the isthmus.

Snow-white clouds were scudding across a velvet sky held in place with sharp, twinkling hooks of light. Beneath the pier, soft waves were lapping hungrily against the pilings, the entire harbor was alive with a thousand bobbing lights and filled with craft, from week-end motor boats to career yachts. From all sides, soft music and the tinkling of happy laughter merged together and drifted to my ears. All the "haves" in the world were here, tonight, and soon they would retire and start loving, and the next day there would be soft

glances and warm breakfast kisses and more love. *Come down off it, Robbins, you're becoming maudlin!*

Occasional footsteps had been passing me for more than two hours. Here in the darkness at the deep end of the pier, I ignored them completely until one pair approached that for some reason carried a personal touch. I whirled about. Captain J. Ronald Briggs, his face furious, grabbed me by the lapels and jerked me to him.

"Did you kill her?" he hissed, his face inches from mine.

"Don't be a fool, Briggs! I couldn't kill my wife."

His hands dropped, he peered at me closely and said, "Marco!" The single word dropped from his mouth like poison.

"That's right—Marco!" I said between my teeth. "And he'll never have to pay, because by this time he's worked up an unbeatable alibi. I know him."

"What are you going to do about it, Robbins?"

"Kill him myself!" I cried. A passer-by looked at me curiously, then sauntered on past. "I'll murder him like he's done the others," I whispered. "He'll pay, you've got my word."

"You can't do it alone, you'll need help."

"No! This is all mine. Every drop of that bastard's blood that spills will be my doing."

"Why are you going to Mexico?"

"I've been ill, thought I'd die and prayed that I would. In my condition, with no strength or real plan, he'd knock me over. I have to live until I kill him. Down there I'll plan things out, there's some way to get him. A mongoose can kill a cobra!"

"Yeah," he said dryly, "and a cobra can kill a man."

"Look, Marco's no smarter than I am, he's just animal-clever. I know him better than any other man, probably even better than he knows himself. I'll get him, don't worry. When you read about his death, you'll know I came back and kept my promise!"

"Come on out to the boat," he said, taking my arm.

"O.K. What time did you get in?" I asked as we walked along the pier.

"Six o'clock. I've been watching you through my glasses for the past two hours. I rowed in under your nose, you must have been dreaming."

I smiled thinly. "I could have been. I made a nightmare out of things, and two people have died because of it. I'm just trying to get my dreams back in tow."

"Nice if you can do it, I've been trying it for years."

We walked along the sloping way to the sand, carefully stepping into the beached dinghy. We caught the next wave, and Briggs bent over the oars, the next dozen strokes carrying us into deep water.

"Where did you hear about Kay, and why the detective act, Briggs?"

"It was in the Newport paper. I knew it was she as soon as I read the first sentence."

"What made you think I had done it?"

"I couldn't see any other way, especially after that Hollywood fellow Greig showed up. But your face told me you didn't. How did Marco find you?"

"Either by tapped wires, or the neatest double cross I ever got dealt. I'm not sure which, yet."

"He almost got another woman last night, by the way," he said casually.

Suddenly my face was cold and my hand dropped into the water, bringing the chill of death. "Varna! I cried."

He nodded. "It seems that she was in the middle of her act when he picked up a bottle from the bar and threw it at her. She ducked, it went past her and almost killed a customer. He made for her and was trying for the kill when they stopped him."

"The sonofabitch, the murdering swine!" I screamed. "I'm going up tonight and kill the drunken maniac!"

"It wouldn't work," he said, shaking his head. "You wouldn't last two minutes."

I tried to light a cigarette and threw it away as a bad job. "What have they got him in for, attempted murder?"

He laughed hollowly. "Who said they've got him in? Hold onto the boat. He was booked for disturbing the peace, taken to night court and fined twenty-five dollars. He was in for exactly eighteen minutes."

"Disturbing the peace!" I cried. "Oh, money, money!"

Briggs-shipped his oars, we climbed aboard the *Paula* and picked our way below decks. He lit a swinging lantern that threw tiny bits of yellow light on the velvet darkness, poured two drinks and placed the bottle between us. His face was grim as he raised his glass in a silent toast to Kay, who in the half-light was as acutely present as she had been on that first day. As the burning stuff quieted my pounding heart, I leaned back and closed my eyes.

"Robbins, I hate to ask, but I'd like to know for a special reason," he said in a hushed voice.

"Go ahead, ask me what I'm going to do about Kay."

"None of my affair, I know, but I liked her more than a little. I'd like to know that she will get a decent burial."

A decent burial. For the first time I began to think of Kay as being eternally gone. Tears welled up in my eyes as I thought of her, once so totally and vibrantly alive. I recalled her hot, moist kisses and demanding body. Through the darkness her piquant face smiled at me as the burning memories of that first morning returned. *You see, I love you, Billy.* One moment we had been strangers, and the next one we had been changed into man and wife, till death, no, Marco did us part.

Guiltily I wiped my eyes and looked across the small table at Briggs. His own eyes were wet as he looked past me into the darkness of yesterday, his lips moving soundlessly, his face tragic. It would have been a good guess that he was thinking of the woman who was making his own life a special hell.

When I withdrew the money from the wallet and counted out twenty hundred-dollar bills, I was in effect withdrawing the blood from Kay's body, embalming her, placing her body in a cold coffin, and shoving the first clouds of earth on it.

"See that this gets to the right people," I told him. "I want her to have a decent burial as much as you do. Buy her lots of flowers and save twenty dollars for a few drinks. She'd like that kind of a send-off."

"I'll take care of it," he quietly assured me. He pocketed the money and poured another round, then looked out of the porthole. "Full moon tomorrow night," he said.

"Sure, and this time a million years from now it'll still be a full moon, tomorrow night."

He downed his liquor in a gulp and sank on the bunk. "And there'll still be people who have all the love in the world inside them, and others to take it who don't have the capacity to return it."

"You sound like my thoughts, Briggs."

"Great things, thoughts, starting nowhere and ending up as tight little bits of madness."

"Lord, she must have done you dirt! Where did you meet her?"

"Not far from here, San Diego."

"Lousy place to meet any girl, strictly navy," I said. "I know a girl from there, a passionate little devil. Lucky for me she belonged to an old friend, MacLaughlin. She had what the nice ladies call the social disease. Mac got it from her, took the cure, then spent his last dime to get her fixed up."

"Married her then?"

"No, she married the doctor!"

He roared, his laughter edged with gall. "The damndest world!" he snorted. "Why is it?"

"You tell me, Socrates, I wouldn't know the answer."

He walked to the cabin door and stood silhouetted against the black sky. "Why couldn't we have been made like those little bisexual creatures that just split in two when they get the mating urge. But no, not us, we're higher, got organs. So what do we do? Instead of facing it and admitting that all we really want is escape from life for a few minutes, we blunder into a relationship with some little trollop who likes sex. If we happen to like the way she grabs us, her smell, or the way she wriggles and scratches, we call it love and spend the rest of our lives crying when she throws us over."

"She hit you pretty low, didn't she, Briggs?"

He returned to his bunk, his face taut and the lines deeply etched. "Sure, but what person won't when it pays off? Her leaving me meant a better, more secure life for her. I don't blame her at all, but the thing that makes me want to puke is that right now, this very instant, I'd get down and crawl if she walked in here!"

"You've had it, all right."

"Hell, I deserve it, I did pretty much the same thing to a damned fine girl. She turned whore after I left her." He paused, poured a drink and swirled it about in the glass. "Here's how, drink up! I've always been sort of proud of her, though. She went to Washington, D. C., during the war, made her connections and went to town. I've seen her pictures next to ambassadors and senators. The last I heard of her she was working for J. Matson, one of the most powerful lobbyists in the capital. I suppose she'll retire one of these days." He chuckled. "I wouldn't be at all surprised if she looked me up and tried to get me back, just to see me squirm on the end of her money-baited hook."

"I'd like to see her. She sounds interesting, but awfully cold-blooded."

"You'd like her. When do you want to leave for Mexico?"

"What a change of pace! If you'll drop me off at Newport, I'll be leaving in the morning."

"I'll take you on down to San Diego, you'll have a better chance to make it from there. By the way, you'd better get that roll changed into something smaller than those big bills. El Presidente Aleman, he no likes big money, says it makes him nervous. Better get fifties. What say we hit the sack?"

It was the American Bar in Tijuana, and the same American Bar that we both had seen all over the world. It was highlighted by a purple-spotlighted dance floor and a nude dancing girl who was explaining the basic desire of sex to the jaded eyes of other Mexicans and the startled eyes of a few Americans.

Briggs and I were spending a few drinks while waiting for my plane. Next to me was a grip into which we had crammed all the things that a well-trained traveler knows that he needs in order to get past the suspicious eye of Mexican customs. The blaring music rose and fell with the dancer's sweating, panting body, creating a tattered backdrop for her manufactured passion.

My friend scratched his head as she finished her dance, her writhing body slowly sinking to the floor. "I know I'm wrong, Billy, but I could swear that I've seen that girl in Lisbon."

I grinned and said: "Yeah, I know what you mean. I've seen her in Casablanca and her twin sister in Tunis. I'm not so sure but what her mother wasn't the original Egyptian belly-dancer."

He roared and slapped my back. We were both growing mellow, having coasted down the stream of double martinis we had consumed from San Diego to Tijuana. I leaned back, and for a few moments forgot the grim reason for my flight—murder, another man's. I grinned at a fat American who was arguing with his bejeweled wife and poked Briggs in his ribs. He had been studying me, grinned a little at the poke, then bit his lip and blurted out, "I know you don't know much about me, and I'm always asking questions, but I've got just one more, then so help me, that's all!"

"Let fly, skipper."

"How about this Varna, does she mean anything to you?" He saw my face tighten and my eyes look unseeing past him. "Forget it, Billy, tell me to shut up."

"It's all right," I said, shaking my head. "She probably means to me what your girl does to you. That's all there is, I just love her."

"Then why did you marry Kay?"

I laughed shortly and finished the drink. "No good reason. Varna gave me the kiss-off, Kay came down to see me, we got drunk and had ideas at the same time. That was all it took."

"She appeared to love you."

"I think maybe she did. Don't get me wrong, I'd have stuck with her to the end. She was a sweet girl."

"Yeah, I think she would have made a good wife. Will you ever see this Varna?"

"I don't know, you guess with me."

"Don't you care, or are you afraid to know?"

"Look, Socrates," I said, placing my hand on his shoulder. "The last thing in the world that I need is a woman. I'm going to retire for a while, and no female, repeat, no female has a place with me. I'm fighting for my life and to me, for some damned-fool reason, it's important!"

He looked embarrassed, peered at his watch and made a quick gesture toward the waiter. "It's almost eight-thirty, just time for another drink. *Mozo, por favor!*"

The silver plane slowly taxied from the customs' shack into the darkness, lined itself up with the runway lights, and with a throaty roar flashed down the runway and lifted itself into the night. Minutes later we were flying past the brilliant lights of Tijuana and Caliente, headed southeast over the Gulf of California. Destination—Mexico City, and survival.

Antonio di Marco, you're going to die. I say it softly, not in hate, but in the sureness that the world will be a little cleaner when you are dead. If there is a God, and I must answer with my immortal soul for your murder, I commend it to him, and his sense of right and wrong.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The revolving stage at the El Patio Club slowly turned. The suave, waltz-playing "American" orchestra slipped from view, and a sleek group of musicians appeared, ready to shoot into our veins the weaving narcotic, eager to take those little black notes that lay on the pages of music and turn them into billowing waves of sound.

The vocalist, cloaked in a shimmering, sequined gown, stood statue-like against a velvet curtain, reminding me of a virgin about to be sacrificed to the gods. That thought was probably giving her the slight edge on a benefit of any doubt: with a twitch of her animal hips, she slunk from the stage to the dance floor, her classic figure highlighted by a blue spotlight that threw into bold relief

the lushness of her pliant figure.

In her crouching, feline stance, she seemed suddenly desirable until Varna entered my thoughts. After that she was nothing, and not even her brassy, sexy voice could interest me. Varna—Varna, where are you, what are you doing this instant, this tiny segment of eternity?

I felt eyes watching me.

The smart boys say it can't be so, but we less-learned ones know it is; we feel eyes knifing into our bodies, our muscles twitch, and our spines jerk. I turned slowly and looked into the half-darkness until I saw her. From a floor-side table, a hauntingly beautiful face, partly hidden behind a poised glass was closely studying me. Something about her said American. I raised my glass, and her eyes met mine as she graciously took the silent toast, a faint smile on her curved lips.

I arose and wended my way through the maze of tables. She was thirty-five or so, every inch of her showing class, the kind you see at horse shows and charity bazaars. She reached out for her purse, and then changed her mind, raising her eyes to meet mine with a jerky little sigh.

She seemed to unwind, and for the first time I noticed that she had been as tight as a watch spring. She took a deep breath, her small breasts rose and fell, and a little tongue flicked across her mouth as she waited for me to speak.

"Maybe I'm wrong, but I've always been sort of proud at being able to recognize an American. Am I right, or do I say, 'Pardon?'"

She laughed lightly, and her rather narrow lips drew back to reveal a perfect set of small, glistening teeth. "American from the very word, Mr. . . ."

"Greig, Jack Greig. I'm glad I wasn't wrong, I don't like apologies. May I sit down for a few minutes?"

After giving me the rapid once-over and delving into her mental files for probable facial characteristics of potential mashers, she apparently got the green light from her mental stop signal. She said, "Please do! I'm Teresa Mayberry. Why don't you have your drink sent over, Mr. Greig?"

"On one condition. I spent five years in the army, and I got awfully tired of hearing my dad's name. How about using the one my mamma tossed at me, Teresa?"

"All right—Jack!"

She laughed again, this time as genuinely as a five-carat stone. When she let the curtains down a bit, she was sunny California, but with them tightly drawn, she was strictly rock-bound coast of Maine. At my signal, the waiter brought two drinks, then two more and again two more, and then it was her turn, and she was "Baby," and I was "Honey," and once again there was a woman in my life. But this time it was different. She was like an old friend of the family, and when we looked at each other it was without sex: when we danced, with her as light as an angel in my arms, my thoughts were entirely alien to those of the old Billy Robbins.

"Teresa, I'm having lots of fun. How about you?"

"More than I've had for a long time. I like you, Jack, you're fun without—the other."

"Yeah, I know, I'm tired of that too. It's been a long time since I knew a girl like you. Let's see now, after the fifth grade . . ."

She laughed and the laughter caught hold, and we both got quite a kick out of it all. We went back to the table, and she got serious for the first time that evening. The offer rocked me back until I saw that her eyes were clear and unveiled.

"Go to Acapulco with you?" I said. "Sure, it sounds like fun. When shall we leave?"

"I thought early tomorrow morning would do. Emilio, my guide, says that we should start early so that we can make Taxco before

dusk. Jack," she reached over and touched my arm, "maybe I shouldn't have asked you, but . . ."

"But you were lonely and thought you'd like company, the safe kind that wouldn't be making a pass every time you lifted an eyebrow."

"Bless you, Jack. Yes, I'm lonely. They told me that it would help to get away from the wreckage and see new things. It hasn't helped a bit, and I'm so lonesome I could die!"

Her eyes grew bright and moist and she dabbed at them with a little hankie. I drew on my cigarette and scowled into the darkness at my own past that bounded back at me and stayed just outside the circle of light on the dance floor. Unconsciously I made a grab for the shadows, reaching out to throttle them, then turned back. Teresa was watching me peculiarly.

"Jack, why did you do that?" she asked in a puzzled way.

"Just an old friend I wanted to get even with. Forget it, I just made a pass at a musquito. Where are you staying?"

"At the Del Prado. And you?"

"Is there another hotel? Look, why don't we head back and get some sleep? I could meet you for breakfast, and we could get an early start with more or less clear heads."

"Fine, let's go!"

"I'm with you. Forward to Acapulco, and white sands, and long, cool drinks."

"And long nights that won't die in spite of those long, cool drinks, memories that just live on and on," she said sadly. "Let's go."

The next morning I was standing, counting the flags of different nations they had hung in the lobby to celebrate some convention. The garish display made a patriotic welcome mat for the world travelers and was a vari-colored signpost of friendliness. In spite of the hodge-podge of architecture and the madly modern design, the lobby of the Del Prado stood out as a sincere result of love's labor. My count of the flags had just reached twenty-nine, and I was vainly looking for the hammer and sickle when Teresa walked up. She was wearing some green thing and a pert little hat.

"Good morning to you, I'm hungry," I said.

"Listen to the man!" she laughed. "It's the nature of the beast. All right, let's eat."

She turned toward the dining room, but I caught her arm lightly. "Really like the food in there, Teresa?"

"Oh, not especially. Why?"

"Ever try the Fuente Soda in the arcade?"

"Do you mean the coffee shop?"

"Yeah. While you're up here with your bowing waiters, dinner music and expensive wine, eating your twenty-peso *filet mignon*, I'm down there with the rest of the peasants, biting into a *filet* of the same critter for six pesos. Yeah, and drinking the best beer in the world."

"I bet that wherever you go there's cheap food and good liquor! All right, I'm game. Let's go."

We swept across the countryside, over the mountains and through the dales, reaching Cuernavaca about noon. We ate in a quiet little café close to the cathedral and prepared to leave. Emilio had a great interest in something behind the bar, more than once his eyes had strayed to what must have been his own Eden. Finally, my curiosity aroused to where it was ready to snap, I blurted out, "Are you in love, Emilio?"

"What do you mean, Meister Greig?" He scratched his head.

"You're on the make for something behind that bar, or I'm nuts. I mean that there's something damned interesting there." I added to his puzzled stare.

"Oh!" he grinned flashingly. "La tequila!"

I like the shape of the bottle. Observe how flattering are the curves, how they seem to you say, caress the wonderful liquor. It is beautiful, truly!"

"Would you join us, Emilio?" I asked.

"Oh, I dare not, the mountains, the curves and dangerous drivers . . ." he ended weakly, a pushover for a small sales talk.

"Aw, come on!" I said, giving him a mental nudge, "we all need one. Right, Teresa?"

"It's something like wine, isn't it, Emilio?" she asked trustingly.

Emilio mentally crossed himself for the lie and said, "Yes, something like it—a little, perhaps."

"*Tres tequilas!*" I called to the waiter, who grinningly bounced up within seconds and placed three minute glasses in front of us.

"What are the lemons for?" Teresa asked, pointing to the cracked saucer that held sliced lemons. "Dessert, maybe?"

Emilio, now in raptures, grinned and said, "No, how you say in America, we chase it with the lemon. Once inside, it is like having devil by the tail and too late to let go. *Mire!* Look!"

He squeezed the lemon into the drink, raised his eyes in a silent prayer for sublime aid and up-ended the glass. His eyes closed tightly, the veins of his neck protruded, he wheezed and then opened his dark eyes. They were wet with tears.

"See?" he said in a strained voice. "Easy!"

Teresa and I looked at each other, then she broke into laughter, daintily squeezed the lemon into her glass and waited for me with poised glass. I sat eying the drink as if it were a reincarnation of the devil himself. She giggled and reached over to squeeze the lemon.

"O.K., you gran' American señor, going to let Emilio get the better of you. Where's your national pride?"

"Haven't got any," I admitted.

"Man! Are you without honor? Drink up!" she cried.

Shuddering visibly, I closed my eyes, took a deep breath and tossed the drink into my innocent mouth. I coughed wheezed, burned, choked and gasped for breath as great tears flooded down my flaming cheeks. It was hot, liquid pepper, garnished with roaring flames, whose licking tongues flicked greedily at every fiber in my body.

The flames subsided, I sank back in the chair and opened my eyes, watching the room swim back into shape. Teresa was laughing openly, and Emilio was shaking in silent mirth.

Shrugging it off in a continental manner, I said, "Not bad stuff, what did you say they called it?"

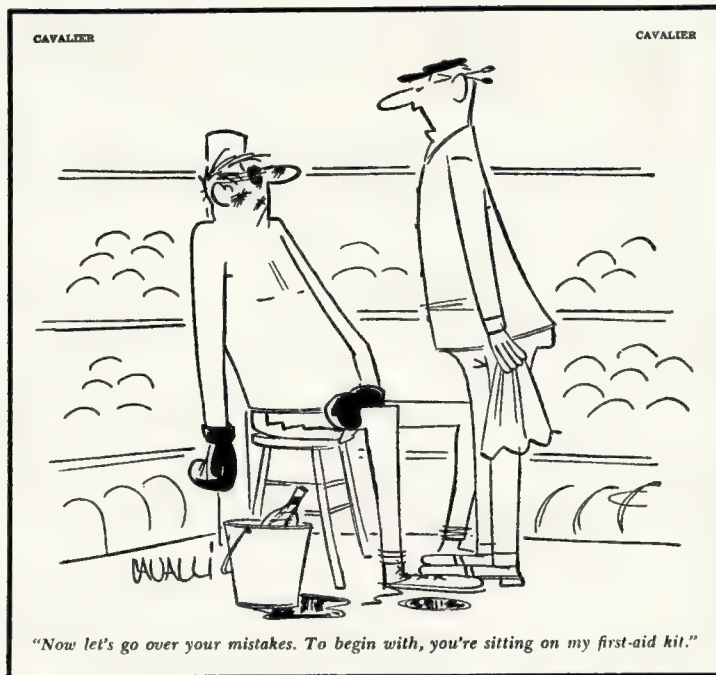
They both roared, then she did something that left me gasping and created a new respect for her in my mind. She calmly tipped the glass and, without pause, sipped the tequila like it was weak tea. Only once did she show a slight sign of spasm, but it was quickly brought under control. As she turned to me her eyes were only slightly damp, sparkling musically as they accepted Emilio's ecstatic applause.

"Decadent American male!" she cried accusingly.

I bowed my head until a rattle of dishes made me look fearfully up. The smiling waiter was placing three more tequilas before us. I closed my eyes, reached for the glass and gulped the liquor. Lord help us poor sinners!

You can take your quaint Indian villages in the Andes, chateaux in the towering Alps, smart Canadian resorts, and villas on the Isle of Capri. I'll take Taxco.

We rounded the last of ten thousand wild curves and came upon the town that huddled against the mountainside like a rare jewel in a natural setting. As the sun sank behind



"Now let's go over your mistakes. To begin with, you're sitting on my first-aid kit."

the western mountains, the town sparkled, came alive as the buildings lost their entity and became part of the whole. Resembling a jeweled diadem, the lights strung from the side of the towering mountain and down into the center of the village.

From a tall tower that was sinking into darkness, bells pealed out into the night, bringing to the ears a beautiful, musically clad backdrop. We stood hand in hand as the bells lost their final notes in the echoing darkness. Teresa turned to me with tears in her eyes.

"Gorgeous," she said softly.

"Magnificent!" I agreed.

"Do you mean that you can see something like that and not just for a moment believe in Someone?"

"I don't know. If there is Someone, I'd be willing to bet that He doesn't live far from here."

"You like Taxco?" Emilio asked as he walked up to us.

"Very much," Teresa answered. "There's something about it that gets a person."

He nodded seriously. "Yes. In the morning, it is very pretty, but at night, just when the sun leaves . . ."

"Yes!" I prompted.

"It is like God was here. We all know the feeling, no one is left out."

The next morning Teresa and I walked the mile or so into town, down the cobbled, narrow and crooked streets, exploring the steep bypaths and hidden ways. It was our town, from out of the misty past of fairy tales it had come to us, and for hours we were alone in the world, coming back to reality only when we blindly stumbled into a "Coke" box.

We bought a few silver trinkets, had a couple of beers and visited the cathedral, a great majesty of stone and glass. I made a soft spot in my heart for it, because it's the only one I heard of in Mexico that wasn't built by slave labor. Instead, the cathedral of Taxco was raised sincerely and for the greater glory of God with paid help. Nice thought that at least one of the churches had no

hatred poured into its foundations. Señor José Borda, silver king, take a little bow!

We sat in the square, waiting for Emilio to meet us. Even in mid-morning, the solid citizens had taken their places on the benches surrounding the bandstand and were preparing for the afternoon siesta by growing tired. With my eyes closed, peace filtered into my soul. We might have been ten lifetimes away from the crazy world of Marshall Plans and hate, hydrogen bombs and evangelists.

At least one American woman had the guts to do what I would have liked to, but couldn't do. She was a writer of sorts who came to Taxco, left, then felt its great force and returned. Here she lives her life, hurried by nothing, achieving a peace of mind unattainable by most people. Her house is open to all, rich and poor alike, and she is respected, for she minds her own business. As we left her home and entered the car, bound for Acapulco, she waved us good-bye. My last glimpse of her was from the rear window; she had bent down to talk with a Mexican boy, and her face was kind and gentle.

Take a number, add ten zeros, multiply it by ten thousand and then again by itself, and you have ten per cent of the curves from Taxco to Acapulco. It's the nightmare of drivers, with each curve as blind as a bat and as mean as a hooded cobra. Death waits at the top of each hill, and there are ten million of them until you descend into the cove that is Acapulco.

It relieves peaceful and soft under the sun, its every idle gesture telling the visitor to relax, for there is no God but peace, and the American dollar.

We registered at the Hotel de las Americas which crouches high above the calm waters of the bay, proud as an advertising executive who has just landed the "Lucky Strike" account. Our days were spent in the pool under the kind sun, and in walking through the village below. The nights were whiled away drinking and sleeping (in rooms twenty-eight and thirty).

For more than a week it went that way.

until one night came, and I had a dream. Tony di Marco had traced me down here. Late at night after all the guests had retired, he entered my room and at gun point forced me out into the night, down to the pool. With his huge hands, he pushed me under the water and held me there until no more life bubbles escaped. My limp body sank slowly until it rested against the tiled bottom, and my unseeing eyes looked up through the green water. I awoke from the nightmare, wringing with sweat and shaking uncontrollably, the great fear once again with me.

I looked out into the darkness toward the pool where a single, glaring light burned. As I stared at it, things reversed, the light was black and the pool was a shimmering gold. With a fearful grimace, I turned from the window, dressed, picked up the typewriter and went out.

At a table underneath the light, I opened the portable, inserted the paper and stared down at its terrifying blankness. On it, words had to be written; I had to write of Marco, clear my mind of the fear and turn him from an awesome god into a human.

Suddenly the night was filled with the staccato of typing as I grimly wrote the heading: "Symphony of Hate."

Tony Boy, listen hard and get this. I'm going to kill you, some way. I don't know how, but you're going to die. It's no longer just between you and me, it's bigger than that. You're not fit to live. You breathe death and hatred, and I can't believe that life was meant to be that way. Pax vobiscum, Tony—and damn you to hell!

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The sky changed from gray to blue, and the orange sun rose higher into the wide expanse of sky as I stood looking out over the crescent bay. I was dead, dog-tired; my back and shoulders ached, and my eyes were blurred, but worst of all, my throat was parched. In the lobby of the hotel, a sleeping cab driver grudgingly awoke to my jostling.

"Si, señor?" he said, blinking and rubbing his eyes.

"Let's go into town!" I snapped.

"Now?" he asked unbelievably.

"Si, now!" I said, urging him to his unwilling feet.

"Bien," he said, shrugging expressive shoulders.

It didn't make much sense to him as he slammed the car in gear and shot away from the hotel, down the winding road. Ah, but of course! It was an affair of the heart, the Americano was going back to his own hotel. He had loved well, spent a pleasant night and was now returning. The driver's face lighted up almost happily.

"Which hotel, señor, the Casablanca?" he leered.

"I didn't say I wanted a hotel, I've got a perfectly good one back there on the hill. Let's find a place where I can buy some whisky. *Comprende, whisky?*"

"Whisky? Oh, si! Canadian Club, Old Grandpapa, Si, Si!"

"You take me there, yes?"

"Oh, si, go to good store, much whisky," he said, looking back at me.

"Good God!" I screamed as a curve loomed up. "Don't try to entertain me with that face of yours, look where you're driving!"

I sank back in the seat, and we whipped around the last brutal curve, sweeping onto the broad street that fronts the bay. A solitary wreck of a large yacht lay in the shallow water; the skull and crossbones painted on its bow made it resemble a beached pirate ship from the days of Morgan and Kidd. Far-

ther out in the safe, deep water, riding low, their holds full, were large ships of cargo, sitting placidly, cowlike in the midst of proud yachts, which vainly tried to ignore their existence.

My friend ground to a dusty stop in front of a latched store, switched off the ignition and pushed a beat-up, grimy cap over his face.

"We are here, señor," he said, yawning.

That made a little sense, but not enough. "That's swell, *amigo*, but the place is closed. C'mon, let's find one that's open."

But señor, there is no store working now, all people sleep. Pretty soon, hour or two, they get up. Then you buy. We wait here."

"Look, buddy, I don't intend to rot here till the town gets up. I've worked all night, and I think I deserve a drink. We'll get somebody up, the guy in there would murder you if he knew a customer was being kept waiting!"

"Oh, I no think so. He is Juan Pedro, my cousin. He no mind."

This blasted world is full of rackets. I got out of the car, slammed the door and started for the shop. As I rapped hard against the wooden shutters, I looked back. My friend looked at me reproachfully, then resignedly got from the car.

"O.K., señor, you no break the house down, I get us in. But you no make noise, no wake Juan and wife and little ones!"

Taking a pocketknife from his trousers, he expertly went to work on the feeble lock. In half a minute he had slid back the catch, and we were inside the shop. The sunlight filtered weakly through the wooden shutters and climbed the dust that scattered beneath our feet. The room was littered with the accumulated trash of decades of trade and barter. Half of the counter was piled high with smoked fish; their dead eyes looked at me complacently like they were trying to tell me that I was that poor fish and that they were well out of it. All they had yet to do was repose in some Mexican's stomach and bowels before returning to the earth. But I had a heap of living to go through before joining them in some deep oblivion, or barely possible fish and human heaven where there are no barbed hooks or swirling nets, no Tony di Marcos or blazing guns.

The remainder of the counter was, in high contrast, composed of pyramided dummy bottles of whisky, tequila and beer. The driver stood, idly tracing his initials in the deep dust of the counter. He yawned, scratched his head and looked at me.

"How much for Old Granddad?" I asked, spotting the smiling old man on the back shelf.

He yawned again. "I see, pronto." He slid behind the counter and leafed through a dog-eared tablet, added his graft and said brightly, "Twenty-three pesos, señor. Good stuff, you like?"

I whistled long and low. Two-fifty, American money, for a bottle of the best in the world. I damned our stateside taxes to hell and back, then started on the criminally imposed California laws that wouldn't allow me to take a drop of it back with me to the Sunshine State. The liquor interests had California sewed up like a big, fat goose.

"No, just give me one bottle," I sighed. "Make it two," I added when disappointment leaped into his dark eyes.

He brightened considerably and wrapped the bottles in an old newspaper, scribbled a short note to Juan Pedro and stuck it up with the money. He would get his cut later.

We sped back to the hotel, blessed each other and parted as friends. I walked past the sleeping clerk, through the patio and up to my room, poured a stiff drink and stood staring down at the pool. By the time I rolled into bed half the bottle was gone.

I got Teresa off on an afternoon flight, and as the silver plane rose high and circled over the sea, a spirit of ennui overcame me. Everything seemed anticlimactic. So what if I did kill Marco? So what anything at all?

I needed to get good and drunk.

Fifteen or so newly arrived passengers were milling around the few available cabs; the drivers were striking hard bargains—Americans come and Americans go, but their dollar stays on with us. Thank you, good and gracious Lord, make us worthy of the blessings you throw our way.

I walked slowly toward the mob of struggling people; there wasn't any hurry, I could have walked back to Acapulco for all the rush there was.

A tall, slender woman, dressed in a fur-edged creation walked a few steps ahead of me. Her proud manner of walking, and the way the dress clung to her figure made my heart leap; she looked too much like Varna. *Will she haunt me wherever I go, into taverns or temples?* Standing on the edge of the crowd, she placed her small bag on the ground and fished for a cigarette, making no attempt to join the others in the cab-seeking fracas.

As I neared her, she looked out to sea. Her half-profile made my heart leap, carrying me back to the night when I had lain next to Varna and memorized her face in the half-darkness of the dressing room. She turned away from the ocean as an elderly Mexican, disregarding the waving hands, walked toward her and tipped his hat. I was only a few feet away when he addressed her.

"Does the señorita wish a taxi?"

She nodded, and the hair that swept down her neck was long and dark.

"Where does the señorita go?" he asked smiling at her.

"To the Hotel de las Americas, please."

"Varna!"

She wheeled about, her eyes wide and her red lips parted.

"Varna, good God, you've come to me!"

Still she didn't speak, just looked as if she couldn't believe.

"Varna, my dearest!"

I held out my arms, and she flew into them. Even then in my complete ecstasy, I recalled how we had fitted together that first night. People have said they were in heaven; I was more than there, I was in the sublime heights that can only be reached when suddenly everything is all right, and your lover is with you for all eternity.

"Billy!" she said softly, her hands digging into my back, her body pressed trembling against mine. Her soft mouth raised to mine and her lips were sweet and clinging. Yes, this was everything!

Suddenly we remembered we were not alone and made the sad trek back to the world of life and tears. The little driver stood smiling faintly at us, his hat held in his hands like he was in church.

"You still need a cab, señorita, or maybe you fly to Acapulco now?"

Varna laughed, and we entered the cab.

After no end of argument and one hundred pesos, I got Teresa's vacated room for Varna. Unable to leave her, I sat on the bed while she went to the bathroom, not being quite able to believe that angels do such things. When she returned, she smelled of soap, clean and wonderful.

She sat next to me, her hands went to my face, caressing it gently, then suddenly she was in my arms, and we were lying down, holding each other fiercely, our lips tightly mashed together, our bodies throbbing as one. When the kiss was through, we lay there, drinking in the sight of the other one. It was impossible, but she was even more lovely than I remembered.

"I missed you, you know," she said.

"Is that the word? I died a thousand times, but they always brought me back. There weren't any more days, so they had to give me nights. It was awfully dark, Varna!"

"My darling, you do love me, then," she murmured.

"More than you know, Varna, I can't tell you how much."

"No, it is impossible, Billy. For you I still have the feeling of that first night. It has never left, just grown stronger. I love you."

"My darling!" I almost shouted.

"Billy . . ."

"Yes, beloved?"

"Marry me now, today!"

What can you do but lie there and stare dumbly into her pleading eyes? Can you jump up and turn cartwheels? How about standing on your head? No, you just look at her gorgeous features, vivid eyes and passionate mouth, wishing to hell and back that you didn't have to say:

I can't, not yet, Varna."

"Promise you will marry me now, Billy. I never asked a man before, my dear." She smiled. "I never knew it would be so easy."

"You know I can't endanger your life, Varna."

"Without you, I have no life. You must know that."

"Varna, listen to me!" I pleaded. "This thing between Marco and me is building up into murder! You know him. If he knew we were married, he would kill you. Yeah, and he'd be sure that I was alive to see it."

"Billy, now you listen to me. We will go to Italy. I have money, fifty thousand dollars my father left me. We can live in Napoli and be very happy."

"Live in Napoli—and wait for Marco to find us, and every time we heard a noise after dark, it would be he, and we would grow old before our time with worry. Then one day he would find us, and there would be no running because I would try to save you. My gun would be in the drawer, of course. It always is when the good guy gets it. And Marco would kill you."

Her eyes filled with tears. It was a slow process, but they overflowed and ran across her face. Like the first night, I wiped them away with my lips.

"No, I love you too much, and I can't run any more. When did you see him last?"

"Two weeks ago. He just disappeared."

"Looking for me," I said. "Varna, why did that pig throw the bottle at you?"

"He—he had my phone wired, and he knew I talked with you. That's how he found you."

"Where did you hear about Kay?"

"I knew he had killed her the next day. His face was completely mad, something was in it. Then when I saw Captain Briggs . . ."

"Of course!" I cried. "That's how you found me, I hadn't even thought about it. God bless him, if he were here, I'd kiss . . . I'd buy him a drink!"

She smiled and kissed me gently. "He was sitting on the steps of my apartment one night when I came back from the show. He just said, 'Don't tell Robbins I came here, or he'll knife me.' He told me you went to Mexico City, using Jack Greig's name. After that, it was easy."

"Varna, you're leaving here. I'm sending you back."

That was the hardest thing I had ever said. I was kicking the only thing in the world out of my life. When she looked at me, it wasn't the face of a hurt woman, it was understanding and love.

"When are you going back, Billy?"

"In a few days, two or three."

"You will return through Mexico City?"

"That's right, then hop a plane to Tijuana."

"Please let me return to Mexico City with you, it isn't too much to ask!" she begged.

"Do you know why I'm going back, Varna?" I asked, looking at her closely.

"To—face Marco?"

"More or less. There won't be any peace in my life as long as he is alive. I never killed a human yet, but . . ."

A look flashed across her face that made me stop talking. It wasn't horror, or fright, just a naked, deadly picture that lasted only for the space of a thought, and then it was beautiful again. Once I saw a tiger in the brush down in India, just for a second, but I never quite forgot the way its face was tight and deadly. That was hers.

"Billy, I beg you. Come away with me."

"You know you wouldn't respect me, Varna. If I ran away, you'd hate me."

She sat up and looked across the room, then back at me. "I have seen so much death in my life. I wonder if the time will ever come when death isn't there."

I arose and pulled her to the center of the room. "Got a bathing suit, beautiful one?"

"I had thought perhaps we might swim together," she said, nodding.

"We will, I'll go change. You've got three minutes. Can you make it?"

" . . . All right, Billy, then we come back here. I have thought of you so often!"

Late that night she was sleeping in my arms, and I was looking out at the bright, metallic stars. My heart was full, she was with me. But how long would I have her; would she be giving someone money for my burial as I had for Kay's?

Would a discreetly clad mortician be saying to her, "Of course, madam, we do have the seventy-dollar funeral, but the coffin is of a thin plywood. I'm sure that you wouldn't want your loved one's remains spoiled by seepage in a matter of weeks. Now this lovely container is only fifteen hundred dollars . . ."

I shuddered and sank slowly into sleep, Varna's breath fanning my cheeks.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

A thousand feet beneath the plane, Mexico City sprawled out, resembling nothing more than a fifteenth century map, full of high color and romance, towering cathedral spires and myriad crooked streets. But my heart was heavy, there was no room for travel-fold beauty. When I was a kid, and the last hunk of pie awaited my descending fork, the same feeling had been there. Interlude Billy and Varna was dropping the second curtain. There wasn't even a punch line to keep them laughing, and for all anyone knew, or cared, the third curtain would never rise.

We started drinking early, in dead seriousness, at the Del Prado's *Nichte Ha*, a stylish place named after an Indian princess and her lover. It had been one of those tragic love affairs that only a people who have suffered through the ages can dream up. The wall murals told the tale; majestic black stallions fought grim battles on wind-swept hills, protecting the lovers from their ferocious enemies. As in all legends, the fighters of evil had that noble look, and the upholders of the dark were bitter and twisted.

We were Mr. and Mrs. American Success on a world tour as we finished our drinks and looked for the absent waiter. We sat stolidly motionless, watching the other drinkers, our thoughts for the first time private property. The orchestra finished something from Romberg, then segued into *Internezzo*; a strolling violinist moved between the tables, occasionally standing quietly, his eyes closed, creating a mood of love and dreams.

The mellow strains swelled louder until

he stood before us. His eyes grew more thoughtful as he watched the tightly held lines on our faces, then he smiled just a little and said: "You are not happy, I have failed. What would you like to hear my violin speak?"

Varna's face softened, and she smiled. "Please, señor, does your violin know *Santa Lucia*? It is a very old song of my country, but perhaps . . ."

The violinist smiled, the music built to a new climax, and a tremor passed through me as the pleading notes hit a new high in pathos before fading away softly. He left the table, swinging into Varna's song, solo for a second before the orchestra picked him up. Varna was silent, but her eyes thoughtful and halfway around the world, but the instant it was over, she turned to me pleadingly.

"Billy, must I kidnap you? Please come away with me. Our home will be peaceful like Santa Lucia."

"That's right, dear, until one day there would be a discord—Marco."

"Marco," she said in a faraway voice. "I wish I could kill him!"

"Not you, I'm the one. All the bets are down, when Kay and I married, I threw the dice, and now I've got to make my point, or lose them—forever."

"You are going to kill him, for us?"

"For you and me, and a few other people, those he has ruined, and those he will ruin, if he lives."

"And then—then, Billy, what will you tell the police? Will you say you killed a man for you and me, and someone who has never seen him? They will say, 'This man is dangerous, we must kill him!'"

That rocked me back. Somehow, in my plans, the law never had a place, probably because my thoughts had been primeval, before law and order existed. Marco's murder was not basically in the realm of any township's business. But try and tell them that!

The evening was a flop all around, and we left shortly after that. For a long time I lay in bed, unable to sleep, then resigned myself, dressed and walked out into the night. I walked to the cathedral, standing in front, trying to talk to God. The words died unborn, and I struck off to the National Pawn Shop, dreaming of owning the biggest gun in the world as I looked in the windows. Back to the park I went and sat by the fountains, talking to the statues. They agreed that mine was one hell of a mess—and kept spouting water from their grinning mouths.

Long after midnight I returned, my legs aching and my body sore, but my mind as tight as a spiraling whirlpool. I flopped into bed and smoked countless cigarettes, my mind throwing things about, knocking them together until the most unrelated items massed into formation, making not one little bit of sense, merely opening the way to madness.

Things projected themselves on my mind in a reverse order. I was at the bar at Tijuana, drinking a double martini—heard Marco pounding through the canyon after me—saw him standing on its edge—heard the glass from the cottage window fall to the sidewalk—Kay lying in a crumpled heap on the floor, faster and faster backward through time—Martin Moss rising to murder himself—our flight to Las Vegas—the meeting with Varna, Marco and Kay—my very first meeting with him—the story I wrote about him—my first job with the syndicate—a girl in a doorway, softly kissing me good night, my hands reaching for her body—my life as a boy—two years of reform school, along with the homosexual guard—my father's death—the memory of my first theft, when I stole ten cents from my mother—a

naked woman when I was hairless, and the way it affected me—a crying child in a dark room and a whipping—then blackness swirled over me, and I seemed to re-enter my mother's womb, and things lost meaning.

The incessant jangling of the phone brought me back to life. Through the open window, the sun was streaming; seven stories below, cars were screeching and honking their threatening ways through the streets. Across the street a military band was playing, and somewhere blocks away, riveters were working with a clatter and a roar. Still the phone rang and I rolled toward it.

"Hello," I answered hoarsely.

Billy, I'm sorry, I thought you would be up, it is nine o'clock."

"I had trouble getting to sleep. Where are you?"

"In my room—waiting for you," she said softly. "When will you come to me?"

"I'll be down in half an hour, got to get a few cobwebs out first. 'By Varna. Got anything to tell me?"

"One big thing, my Billy. I love you."

The stingingly cold water needed into my face, on my shoulders and stomach and trickled down my legs. Not a bad body. A bit showprow, could use some padding here and there, but on the whole, not too bad.

The whirring of the electric razor was soothing to my nerves, and a double shot of Old Granddad's special prescription brought me back to my own normal form of madness. Exactly thirty-three minutes after she had called me, we were in her room, kissing and swearing eternal love, a mental state in which I once more believed.

Two hours later we were sitting in front of the palace of Carlotta and Maximilian, high above the town which was a post card to send to the folks back home. Several times I tried to say what was in my heart until she held my hand and said softly, "What is it, dear?"

"You know that I love you more than anyone, anywhere, don't you?"

"I had hoped you did."

"Will you promise me something?"

"Billy, I think you could have any promise."

"Then go to your home until I am through."

"My home is with you. It cannot be anywhere else."

"Varna, return to Italy. My chances will be better if you are safe."

"You really want it that way?"

"It must be, there's nothing else. You must go back!"

"Very well," she sighed. "I promise. When shall I go?"

"Tomorrow. Do you have your passport?"

"Yes, I have my passport."

"You understand why, don't you?"

"She nodded. "And now take me back to the hotel. I want to be with you."

The next afternoon, I stood watching a plane grow smaller in the haze until it at last lost itself in the distance and the brimming of my eyes. I turned and boarded another plane, going back to Los Angeles, and my friend and your friend, Antonio di Marco.

Coming back, Marco. Curse you, I'm coming back!

The lights on Skid Row were doing their best when the bus dumped me off at Sixth and Main in Los Angeles. At the foot of the Row on Sixth, I checked my bag and all but a few hundred dollars.

A war surplus searchlight was stabbing the sky futilely, bouncing off the low-hanging clouds as it advertised a strip show. *See everything but a little, you can dream the rest.* Across the street, in a sex show, the flashing neon lights were busily engaged in their permanent role: "Adults Only," with a floosie sitting on the edge of the bed, her

garters showing. Lights: beer, wine, women, food, money, sleep, sex, anything. Watcha want? Gimme the damn dough, and I'll get it for you.

The night manager showed me to my room in a hotel near Third Street, the same place where I had stayed on my first trip to Los Angeles. Don't ask me why I picked Skid Row when I could have afforded the best, unless I knew that if anyone came looking for me, the people wouldn't talk, because when a man in their midst is wanted, only a stool pigeon will talk—and they don't last too long here.

Consciousness flowed away, and sleep like I hadn't known for months took over, sweeping around my mind and lifting it into wonderful, and for a change, peaceful dreamland. I was a boy, fishing, swimming, loafing and day-dreaming, smoking my first cigarette and kissing my first girl, feeling the tenseness of her lips. Scenes constantly shifted, perfection-like; as soon as one began to pale, another took its place, and when morning shot through the window, I was completely relaxed and lazily watched the sun creep across the ceiling.

The waitress placed the bacon, potatoes, and eggs over lightly, in front of me, making me the center of covetous attention from the rest of the clientele who, for the most part, sat hovering over coffee and day-old doughnuts. I shrugged at them, hoping that the gesture said: *Look, I'm not showing off, don't get me wrong, I made a pile last night, and I'm blowing a little of it on my first decent meal since the Year One.*

With each click of metal wheels, the streetcar I hopped on Hill Street carried me that much closer to my meeting with Tony di Marco. As I sat, mentally polishing up the future plans, the car whipped past my Vine Street stop. I jumped off at Ivar and doubled back to the Playtime Room, into the dark, cool interior. As usual, Max was at the inside end of the bar, reading the *Times*. He looked up casually, swallowed and quietly laid the paper down.

Hi, Billy, the usual?" he asked me tightly.

"Make it a double this time, Max. You owe me one. Greeting, fellow members!" I said to the steady customers.

I was a cyanide pellet in the gas chamber as they smiled at me, then shudderingly communed with their drinks. Within three minutes, they had made crippled excuses to each other and were hustling out to the blinking sunlight. The last poor Joe didn't have anyone for his alibi, so he just trotted out like a pathetic puppy.

"What the devil's the matter with my buddies, Max? That looked like the sweetest kiss-off I ever got!"

"You're poison, Billy, plain strychnine!"

"I had no idea. Tell me more, unless you want me to leave. This begins to listen good."

He waved his hand deprecatingly, shook his head and poured himself a double shot that died quickly. He nervously ran a hand through his curly, black hair, removed his rimless glasses and polished them quietly, replaced them and peered at me almost fondly. I finished the drink and set it expectantly on the bar. He smiled thinly, brought up my favorite whiskey and placed the bottle before me.

"The condemned man drank a hearty meal?"

A nod.

"He's really after me?"

Another nod.

"God, I need a friend. Give me the word and don't spare it, Max."

He sighed and reached across the bar to place a shaking hand on my shoulder. "Get out of town, Billy, but quick. This is the first day I haven't had a fink in here, looking for you."

"Can't do it, I came back for a reason." The phone rang. Max answered it, his eyes fixed thoughtfully on mine. He scowled, and his face reddened under the white bar lights. "No, damn it, he's not here! He wasn't here yesterday and won't be here tomorrow! I hope to God I never see the son-of-a-bitch again, he's ruining my business!" he screamed before slamming the phone down. He turned back to me with a wry smile on his face. "Sorry I had to call you that, Billy, but it's strictly routine. I got three voices in that damned phone that I play tag with."

"Three voices?"

"Yeah," he muttered. "And all three want one guy—Billy Robbins."

"Any idea who they are?" I asked, pouring another.

"That's a good question. One of them comes through a switchboard. We got wires crossed one day, and I started talking to the Health Department."

"Number one, the real law," I said. "Marco's got connections down there."

"Yeah, could be. The other one's a dick too, only private, or I lay down. I'd know that line of crap any day."

"Shoulders! He wants me for more reasons than one."

"Yeah," he sighed. "We got a Shoulders, a big guy gorilla, athletic club stuff, looks like a 'Snow Bird.' But the guy on the phone isn't him. And then I get a call from another place, a sulky, low voice, a couple of times a day. Funny thing, if they'd show me a million pictures, I think I could pick out this fellow just by his voice. It's always just like he was going to cry. Then, of course, till just the other day, we had Tony di Marco himself!"

Marco comes in here?" I gasped.

"Not his sister. He played hell with the business. The trade's dropped off fifty per cent since that big ape started coming in."

"Sorry, Max, I'll pay you back someday."

"Forget it, I'm making wages. Have another drink. Need any money to blow town?"

"No, I'm loaded. Besides, I'm staying."

"You're joking! Look, Billy, this isn't radio. A lot of people want your scalp. One guy after you is bad enough, but when an army starts moving in, leave. Brother, I mean run!" He poured himself a drink with his shaking hand and gulped it down.

"I don't run any more, Max, I've stopped. All the yellow's faded away."

"What does your wife say about this?"

I looked across the bar. His glasses reflected back, but the parts of his eyes that showed were worried and concerned. His forehead was wrinkled, and his face was tight. At least out of all this mess, I had discovered one real friend. I wondered what his reaction would be when I said:

"She's dead, Max. Marco killed her at Catalina."

"So that's why you came back," he said. He swore softly and took another drink.

"Yeah, just why, I've got to get him now before he gets me."

"I never met her, but she must've had guts to marry you."

"She had 'em all right."

"I suppose Marco alibied like hell and made it stick?"

"He didn't have to. He wasn't questioned, because they never found out just who she was."

"Good God," he prayed in a soft voice. "What are you going to do, go on a one-man crusade against him?"

"Yeah, sort of. I'm going to try and kill him. He's got it coming."

"So have lots of people, but they lived to ripe old ages and danced on the graves of crusaders like you who tried to kill them. Look, get smart and beat it. Maybe you'll

still have time. Be a good guy, for your own sake, get out!"

"Uh-uh, no go, Max. I . . ."

"Hello, Billy!" a strange voice said. Two shadows threw themselves across the room, casting it into semi-darkness as the daylight hid behind them. My eyes fixed on Max's suddenly taut face, and my hand tightened on the cold, sweating glass. I tore my eyes from his face and looked into the mirror behind the bar. My tortured reflection was twisted in ghastly fear, a death mask for the ugliest man in the world. As the two pairs of unmatching footsteps tramped across the room, I raised the glass and said to my friend:

"So long, Max, I should've listened to you."

My body was bathed in icy fear, and my stomach was ton heavy, holding up a heart which shook my entire body. Max had been frozen, then his hand slowly dropped behind the bar toward his hidden gun.

"Not that!" a voice smoothly warned. It sounded like a bolt of silk being flung across the room. "Be good, and you'll live to tell your kids about this."

Silk moved lithely across the room and sat next to me. I turned unwilling eyes to his face as my fear-compelled mind turned inward at the meeting.

"Hello, Billy, glad you came back, but you shouldn't have stayed so long. The boss spent a lot of money looking for you."

"Yeah," I said into the educated voice, staring at the small, perfect teeth and smooth features. "I'll pay him back as soon as I get to the bank."

"Whatta card!" the voice behind me guffawed. "That's a laugh!"

Looking up, I saw a mammoth Shoulders, but on a bigger, more deadly scale. The pupils in his eyes were hidden, but then it was probably too dark to see them.

"Sure, he'll be glad to hear that," Silk said. "Well, let's be off."

"Time for one quick drink?" I suggested, holding eternity off for another sixty seconds.

He jerked over his shoulder. "Nat, back across the room and keep ready." He turned back to me. "Don't try anything that seems good, because it won't work. Nat's a crack shot, he doesn't miss. Pour yourself a drink."

"Join me in one last one, Max?" I asked my friend.

"Sure, Billy."

Make it quick, we're double-parked, and it's getting harder to fix tickets," Silk said.

He thought his joke was funny, and so did I. Everyone, all the little people who grub for a living know how impossible it is to fix tickets. We live in a fair democracy where each man is equal to his brother.

Max poured two shots, I raised mine and watched my shaking hand before upping it and gulping down the liquor. This is it, Billy, your last one! The hot stuff fanned out, spreading its last cheer to my stomach. Silently I blessed it, and wished that I knew how to pray.

The big boy backed to the door, peered out and motioned. Silk jerked his head, and I arose from the stool, for the first time realizing what the poor devil who had a bad lawyer feels when he starts for the death house.

The two thugs faded in next to me, their guns pressed in my sides. We walked rapidly across the sidewalk and into the waiting sedan. The driver, without a word, eased into gear and wheeled around Vine Street, south.

Marco, I came back, but you won. I've got only one hope now, that someday you'll have to pay. Not for my life, or Kay's, but for all of the lives rolled up into one huge wrong that you cannot undo. All right, Marco, I'm coming back—at your terms.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The big sedan had an automatic shift and was smooth and fast, but the driver was cautious, kept within the speed limits when he skillfully maneuvered his way through the rushing traffic. The interior of the limousine was custom upholstered, and the seats were soft and deep, contrasting with the thick, bulletproof windows. It was luxury all right, even to the microphone that aloofly hung by the rear seat. Gangsterism in the fifties.

My two newly made friends stared dead ahead, ignoring me like I was some cheap hunk of goods they had picked up at "Auction City," instead of the season's prize catch. They sat close to me, though, hemming me in and keeping my arms pinned down so that even a cigarette was beyond reach.

The sweat poured down my face, stung my eyes, salted my mouth and dripped into my collar, then trickled down my back and into my shoes, which sogged loudly as they moved nervously. I was a sickly mass of humanity, not worth a dime.

A woman, wheeling her baby, stopped and looked longingly into a dress shop. A man turned into a drug store, bumped an elderly lady, apologized and entered the store. Two high-school girls left a corner malt shop and stopped eagerly to watch the approach of two jean-clad boys. A man stood in a used-car lot, shaking his head at the salesman as he inspected a thirty-nine Buick.

PHOTO CREDITS

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Everything was normal, deliciously so, and never was life so savored as it was in these last minutes. The slightest action of any blessedly free person was precious and needed to be watched closely.

The car lurched west on Santa Monica Boulevard and picked up speed as the traffic thinned out, swept past hundreds of dingy shops, gas stations and vacant lots, beer parlors, flashing signals and apartment houses. West of Highland, it swung wide and streaked into a narrow alley, pressing us hard against the seat, then flinging us to the padded roof. Silk muttered under his breath as the driver sped to the rear of the building and slammed to a rocking stop.

"This is it. Out!" Silk demanded, stepping from the car and waiting for me.

He maneuvered to one side, motioned Trigger Boy to the other and led me to the building. I looked up to view my mortuary, a two-story brick affair that connected with another twin on its right. We walked rapidly and lost the rushing sounds of traffic; Varna flashed through my now-numbered mind, smiled sadly, then left me. Silk urged me to an ancient door that seemed to begrudge its own existence as it hung, half closed.

It creaked open, my mouth became cotton dry. I swallowed hard and jumped when a sibilant, rushing sound came to life and swirled about my feet. A second puff leaped out from among a few lush weeds and hissed its way to oblivion before the answer came: we were behind a steam cleaning plant. Inside, someone's clothes were being cleaned; outside, I was being taken to the cleaners, but in a hell of a different manner.

The back room smelled of clothes and sweat and steamy dirt. Rows of neatly pressed

clothes hung on metal racks, red, blue, green, gray, all the colors they had been able to think up since time started; long and short things, blouses and slacks, suits and coats. Clothes, clothes, clothes.

Silk pressed on my arm, we dodged low to miss the hideously inanimate things and stopped in front of a door marked: "Private." As far as Billy Robbins was concerned, they could keep the contents private until eternity. Yeah, just on the other side, eternally sat, waiting gun, grim smile and hatred.

He rapped twice and waited with his white hand on the knob. It fascinated me, his half-woman's hand, waiting for the door of my death chamber to open. *Death is a White Hand*. Goddamnit, Robbins, quit thinking up titles for your lousy show! The door lock buzzed sharply, hitting the air like my death rattle. He pushed hard, the door swung open, and I faced my conqueror.

But it wasn't Marco who sat behind the piano-size desk! In the soul-rocking instant it took to unfocus from the expected to the real, I recognized the face: Mike Abrams, purveyor of the Weed, the Flesh, the Game, the Drink, the pleasure of *You name it if you got the price*.

I staggered through the door like a drunk and sank into a deep leather chair, my eyes gave way and closed, my heart relaxed and my lungs inhaled deeply.

"Cigarette!" I muttered weakly.

With my eyes still closed, I dragged repeatedly on the cigarette someone had placed between my lips and felt the warm smoke swirling in my lungs. Beady sweat grew on my forehead; I wiped it away and looked at the shiny moisture on my hand, then grinned and looked across the room at Mike Abrams.

This was the face that Max could have identified from a million pictures. Somehow, even before the man spoke, I knew that the voice would reflect the sulky features. I started to laugh, louder with each sharp intake of breath until my relieved sounds filled the room. Mike scowled, jerked his small head, and we were alone. From a great distance, the sound of escaping steam came to my ears.

For a good minute he sat looking glumly at me, finally reaching across the desk to pick up a half-smoked cigar. He showed no inclination to speak, so to make things easier, I said:

"Nice place you've got here, Mike."

"You know me?" His eyebrows raised, then lowered to sulks.

"Who doesn't? You're famous. Mothers don't use the booby man any more. They just tell their little brats that they won't grow up to be like Mike Abrams if they're not good as pie."

He almost grinned, then swung away to a drawer and pulled out a sheet of paper. He ran a stubby finger to the bottom, worried the cigar to a corner of his mouth and said:

"Ten grand you cost me. Ten grand to find you!"

"What'll you take to lose me?"

"I'd spend another ten grand and love it. You're worth a lot more than that."

"What's the angle, Mike? I can't see you working for Marco."

He spat a cigar shred from his mouth and sneered: "That bum? He went out with prohibition. I don't need him no more'n I need another head!"

"But me you need, huh?"

"Uh-uh, but you need me."

"Is that why your boys lifted me from a cool bar and scared hell out of me?"

"I had to have you before Marco got to you."

"A hell of a poor excuse," I muttered.

"Know what Marco offered for you?"

"Four bits?"
"Twenty-five grand, alive. Dead, five grand."

"So you stand to make fifteen grand. Is that the angle?"

"Fifteen grand, kid stuff. I got that much in my watch pocket." He got up and leaned across the desk. "Hey! How long you think you can hide from Marco?"

"I didn't come back here to hide."

"Look, Marco's got brains, a few anyway. He'd find you some day and knock you off. This way you can find him. I'll help."

"Sure, I'm a good kid, and you love me, that's why you spent ten grand. Don't give me that crap. I'm going to put the finger on him for you. What's the reward? I mean, what's the syndicate putting up?"

Don't get smart, Robbins, I can toss you to Marco and pick up fifteen grand," he warned scowlingly.

"No, Mike, you forget one thing, you've got that much in your watch pocket."

"You sound smart," he grudgingly admitted. "O.K., I'll let you in. Sure, I want to get rid of Marco, he's a has-been Chicago chump, tryin' to get a foothold where there ain't no room. I've spent money, big dough to get this town in line, and I don't want no chiseler gettin' a free ride on my ticket. We'll get things lined up and knock him over."

"I get it, you've picked yourself a clay pigeon. I'm a good listener, but what's in it for you?"

"You want I should give you blood, too? You save your neck when we get rid of Marco. You want more, Robbins?"

"No, but how do I know you won't knock me over, too?"

"Why should I? You help me, I'll help take care of you."

"I might tell the law where you stay."

He shrugged. "You're kiddin', it's all over town, I ain't hiding. That phone there on the end of the desk, that's direct to city hall. I'm in, you don't have to worry. What say, O.K.?"

"I want to think it over."

"Sure, take all th' time you want, he's in Portland today."

"What's he there for, his health?"

"We tossed him a good tip so's he'd leave. He's been on the run for 'most a month now."

"Is this place wired for sound, Mike?"

"Whatcha mean?" he scowled. "You think this is a movie house?"

"No, but it just came to me that you had trouble with that once. Didn't the vice squad of our fair city have some wire recordings of your little deals? I wouldn't want this to get to a coroner's inquest on a spool of wire. You understand."

"Yeah," he grinned. "Those bastards thought they was smart and wired me up good. They was aimin' for a shakedown. Then some honest bastard got 'hold of them. All in all it cost me eighteen grand to get them back."

"Well, are there any, maybe right under your desk?"

He looked startled, then grinned. "Hell, no! I've personally had this place apart right down to the foundation. There ain't nothin'." Sides, the election's over, and like I say, it's fixed uptown."

"It was just a thought. Where do I stay, in the dungeon?"

He almost laughed until his better nature overcame the impulse. He scowled and said, "I gotta room for you upstairs. Whatcha want, name it, I'll get it for you. C'mon."

"Well," he asked as we stood in a barren room that overlooked the alley.

"Love it, it's what I've always dreamed of. It's even got a bed."

"Better'n a coffin any day," he grunted.

"That depends on who's in the coffin with you, Uncle Mike."

The bare floor held up a table and chair,

an ancient bed and lumpy mattress, a washstand and a toilet, half-hidden behind a coily drawn curtain. Next time, try the train.

"Well, whatcha want?"

"I'm a writer, and right now, I'm lonesome. How about a typewriter?"

"Sure, what kind?" he asked generously.

"Any good portable and a ream of paper. Don't go overboard, number two paper will do."

"So—is that all?"

"A bottle of whisky, a carton of 'Old Golds' and a clean shirt, sixteen, thirty-four. Yeah, you might throw in a razor."

"You're not askin' for much, I'd give that to Marco. O.K., it'll be here in half an hour."

"Thanks, now how much time do I have?"

"I'll give you till Wednesday. After that, I'll toss you to Marco."

"Thanks, I'll let you know late Tuesday just so there won't be any misunderstanding."

He grunted and left the room.

Just like buying a house. If you don't let me know in time, I've got a customer who's just dying for the place. I walked to the window and looked out. At the rear, Trigger Boy sat on a wooden box. He saw me, brought out his gun and fiddled with it, then slipped it back in his holster. I ducked back and flopped on the bed. Probably because I hadn't looked for sleep, it came to me easily, and I lost consciousness. Hours later when I lay with my arms cradled behind my head, I looked out at a flashing neon light, "*Beer—Wine, Beer—Wine, Beer—Wine*," and felt the fierce joy of living. Suddenly I was terrifically grateful to Mike, and if he had entered the room at that moment, I might have agreed to his murderous little scheme.

But a little something inside made me realize that it had to be done only by Billy Robbins. This was personal, like love, and no man sends another to make love for him. No, this was between Marco and me, and if I wasn't good enough, he would be the one who walked away from the last scene.

They had placed the typewriter on the table and the bottle of whisky on top like a phallic symbol. I ripped the tags from the new machine, inserted the paper, and with my eyes closed, typed a few lines just for fun.

The words flowed from the keys onto the paper with complete ease and freedom. Half of the time my eyes were closed, and as scene drifted naturally into scene, and events progressed into the plot, the pile of unused paper gradually shrank and our story, true from the first, grew in size.

My best work has always been done from midnight until dawn slides into the room. In those long hours when no one else exists, I can write as if someone demands that I justify my existence. When he alone is watching, mind leaves body, and outside forces have no part in thoughts. But when life starts again, when toilets flush and cars streak through the streets, when horns blare and light shouts away the darkness and cleanliness of the night, I'm finished.

It was impossible, but dawn was here: I arose and stretched my aching body. As if someone had read my thoughts of hunger, the door opened, and a man I had never before seen brought in a covered tray. He was short and dark, probably a Syrian, and walked with a noticeable limp. Across one cheek, a pale scar traced itself uncertainly on his pock-marked features.

He grinned. "Don'tcha never sleep? I heard ya typin' all night!"

"Never, Buster, I'm not human, but I eat. Put it on the bed."

The eggs were cold, and the bacon had a layer of grease, but it was edible, and I was hungry. I washed it down with water and sank on the bed with a cigarette dangling from my lips.

Mike didn't come in all day. It was Sunday, and he was probably home in his bulletproof chapel. But they never left me completely alone. In the hall, footsteps sounded all day, chairs scraped as they tilted against the wall, throats coughed and men talked, matches flared noisily in the sometimes unbearable quiet, and now and then some voice laughed low and with bitterness. I ate more, killed another bottle and slept the day away.

When the shadows grew longer and plastered themselves against the far wall, I arose and went to the typewriter. Someone groaned in despair as the keys commenced to slam against the paper, and a curse echoed down the hall.

When the third dawn wheeled its way into the room, I was through. I placed a fresh paper in the machine, and in upper case, typed:

THANKS, MIKE, BUT IT'S MY OWN JOB. IF I DON'T GET HIM, YOU CAN HAVE A TRY.

With the story folded in my coat, I cautiously looked out. The Syrian was leaning against the fence, his eyes closed in sleep. I carefully pulled the mattress from the bed and lugged it to the window, working hard to stuff it through. It tore from my grasping arms and fell to the alley. My heart was in my throat as the guard stirred and then lapsed back into sleep.

With a yelp of fear stuck half in my throat, I pushed myself from the ledge and fell to the pavement. The fall would never end! My body neared the ground in a streaking flash, but my mind magnified it out of all sane proportions. I hit the mattress half on my knees and rolled off onto the cement, for a second not moving until life and fear coursed back in my body. The guard moved restlessly; I forced myself into a quiet run and ducked around the corner of the building just as there was a shrill cry, the loud crack of a gun and the whine of a slug past my head.

I ran past the cleaning plant, my legs pumping like mad and my glands dumping quarts of adrenalin into my system. At Highland I looked back and saw the Syrian frantically chasing me, but losing ground with his short legs. Halfway down the block, an "Out of Service" bus trundled toward me. My desperate wave got nothing but a sour look; I made up for it by giving my Syrian friend an obscene Anglo-Saxon gesture with my finger, then ran south on Highland, east to the next small street, south through a vacant lot, across a fence and over to a quiet residential street.

The aching of my lungs had subsided, and my panting was dying slowly as I tried to walk carelessly up the palm-lined street. A nervous look over my shoulder helped a lot, and after lighting a cigarette, I began to swagger a little. Halfway down the block, a car was backing from a driveway. I doubled-timed it and stopped the driver just in time.

"Pardon me, but are you going toward town?" I asked, looking sincerely like a working man.

Inglewood, airplane factory," he mumbled, looking at me carefully.

"Shoot!" I cried. "I was headed down to Slauson to get a bus to Hermosa." Suddenly I got a bright idea. "Say, mister, suppose you could give me a lift to Manchester Boulevard? I could pick one up there."

"Live around here?" he asked.

"I just got in last night. I'm staying with my sister, Ruth Jenkins, in the next block. I'm goin' to see 'bout a job with the light company."

"All right, get in."

"Gee, thanks!" I said, vaulting around the car and jumping in. "This means a lot to me."

Quick thinking, Billy. Approach a working

man, tell him you've got a fighting chance for a job, and he'll bust his neck to get you there. He must have gone a couple of miles out of his way to leave me at a bus stop. With a wave of his hand, he turned down the four hits I offered him.

Well, anyway, Hermosa Beach was as good a place as any. Marco would return from Portland in a few days, and until then I wanted to be alone with my thoughts, because it was an odds-on chance, no, it was for damned sure that my thoughts and I wouldn't be together much longer.

During the days, I stuck close to my room, ate cold beans and pressed ham and drank lukewarm beer. Nights were spent at picture shows and beer parlors and in staying away from the lights, seeking the darkness of the back streets, for the great fear was once again on my shoulders, and my heart thumped leadenly in a dead chest. In my sleep, great waves overcame me; they were rushing, intangible things that held me in complete bondage, throttling my unborn screams.

Saturday night, I slipped from my seat at the noisiest bar in town, walked past the juke box, slammed a nickel in its guts for the loud-est piece and went to the pay phone.

"Evenin', operator. I want the Atlantis Club in Hollywood. Can you help me?"

The operator was polite and efficient.

Two minutes later, with my voice tightly held in rein, I forced the brave words out. "This is Billy Robbins. Let me speak to Tony di Marco."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Who is it?" the voice squawked back unbelievably.

"Billy Robbins. I want to talk with Marco. Do I have to have an appointment, or are you going to put him on?"

"Is this a gag, mister?"

"No gag. Put Marco on that phone, or he'll have your neck. C'mon, I don't have much time."

He placed his hand over the mouthpiece; muffled voices rose and fell in excitement until the first one returned.

"You got the bar at the Atlantis Club. The boss'll be right down."

"I'll wait exactly sixty seconds, I've got things to do," I warned. "I should wait all night to do a man a great favor?" I asked.

"Stick around, don't get mad. We've called him," he begged.

"What's he doing, sleeping off a drunk?" I thought it was funny, but the returned grunt was sour.

More than sixty seconds killed themselves, in fact it was almost five minutes later when the rumbling voice of Tony di Marco roared from the phone. In just one word, he managed to pack more hatred than a normal man could have done in a mad tirade.

"Robbins?" It was more than a snarl, it was a vicious whiplash that made me wince.

"Right!" I answered. "Marco?"

"Where you hidin', bastard?"

"Been looking for me, Marco?"

"You know I have, you sonofabitch. I wanta know where you are!"

"Want to see me, Tony?"

"I wanta feel your throat in my hands!" he screamed.

"Like to kill me, Marco?"

"I'll sell my soul to get you, Robbins. You dirty double-crossin' dog, you. Damn you to hell and back up again!" His voice sank and I had to strain to catch it over the music. "Robbins, I hate you more than I can begin to say. I..." His voice stopped, and his panting was plainly audible.



"So you'd like to get me, Marco. I just had a thought. Tell you what: I want you to make out a certified check to Varna for fifty thousand dollars. When you do that, I'll tell you where to find me."

"You mean that?" he asked hoarsely.

"Every word of it. If you're going to kill me, I might as well make Varna a rich woman, even if it is with your stinking money."

"It's a deal!" he said suddenly. "I'll do it. Yeah, and I'll throw in that ten grand you screwed me out of last month."

Last month—yeah.

"Last month!" I screamed. "Kay was alive, you murdering pig. Remember Kay? She was blonde and lovely, she loved life, every bit of it, and because she loved me too, you killed her. Yeah, you killed my wife, and now I'm going to kill you!"

Kay," he said almost softly, then hardened. "You and Kay shouldn't oughta done that, she had it comin'."

"Yeah, but we did it, and you killed her. How are you going to face your God?"

"I'll never get to face Him. There's too much behind me, and I got nothing to lose by killing you."

He turned from the phone, and his voice faded. I looked about the bar and noticed that the few customers and waiters had made me the center of ogling attention. I turned away and leaned against the wall.

"It won't do any good to trace this call, Marco, I'm calling from a pay phone."

"Thought of all the angles, didn't you?" he rasped out.

"Every last one. I don't have much longer, so let's make our deal. How do I know you'll play ball?"

"I never broke my word to anyone. I won't even to you."

"All right, for some reason I believe you. I just changed my mind about that check. Make it payable to me and mail it to General Delivery here at Hermosa Beach."

"Have you been hidin' there, you crazy dog? I paid to have every beach town gone over with a fine comb!"

"No, I just got in, I was down in Mexico. Did you think to look there?"

"What name didja use? I know it wasn't yours, it cost me heavy to find that out."

"It doesn't make any difference. Do you agree to that check?"

"Yeah," he said heavily. "I'll send it down."

"And you won't try to pick me up when I get it? Have I got your word on that?"

"No one will be there. Now, what's the rest of it?"

"Marco, I always knew that when you got me, you'd make it nice and personal, that you'd never let anyone else do it."

"If anybody else killed you, they'd pay!" he snarled.

"I guess you hate me as much as I hate you, Marco. I used to like and admire you, I guess I thought you were smart to be able to put things over on society. But it got too personal when you started chasing me. Then when you killed Kay, when you threw her body across the room, I hated you down to your guts!"

"Why'd you run then, why didn't you stay and fight me?" he sneered.

"Because I was yellow," I admitted. "I won't kid myself. But that's all past, I'm back now. I came back to kill you."

"That easy, huh? All right, you listen to me, you've had your say. I loved Kay more than I thought I could've. I'd have done anything for her, kissed her feet from here to hell and back and loved every inch of the way. Then you came along and threw yourself at her, and she went for you. So help me when I heard you say that she'd married you, I thought I'd die. Then I hated her as much as I'd loved her."

"It was just the way the cards fell, Marco. It wasn't planned at all. We got drunk, and the first thing we knew, we were married. I wish it hadn't happened. Kay would still be alive."

Yeah, yeah," he said heavily. "Where you going to try knockin' me off? I got the idea that you'll tell me where."

"Sure, glad to. Do you know the Portuguese Bend section?"

"I've driven past it."

"You know that big clump of trees about two miles south? It hasn't been developed yet, and there aren't any houses for a couple of miles. It's on a hill about half a mile from the road, you can reach it from the north by following a side road, or from the south by coming up a ravine."

"I'll find it, don't worry. Will you be there?"

"Man hunt, Marco. You're going on a man hunt. This is Saturday. Be there Tuesday night at eleven o'clock, or before. But remember one thing, the hunt doesn't start till eleven. Oil up your guns, because I'll be in the grove somewhere. From then on, it'll be up to you."

"I'll be there," he said without hesitation, "and alone. I don't need any help, none at all!" he snarled.

"I suppose not," I said, suddenly tired. "We all know that your hate is enough to knock me off. Now about the money, I want it down here Monday morning, or the deal's off. And this time, I'll fly the coop, don't forget that. I'll fly so far you'll never get me!"

"How do I know you won't take the dough and lam out?"

"My word's as good as yours. I won't. All right, Marco, Tuesday night on top of the big hill. Make your peace with God, because I might get lucky and kill you deadlier than hell!"

I lazed around the beach Sunday, swimming a bit and getting a tan. That didn't make much sense, because if the good boys were right, I should soon be getting a very deep tan.

That evening I took a bus to Long Beach and hopped another one for Newport. My car was still in the garage, nestling in the far corner amid cobwebs and thick dust. They shot a quick charge into the battery and I rolled away, feeling like a capitalist, driving my own car for the first time in many weeks.

At the Arches, I swung with the traffic and parked in front of Holly's Boat Landing, and got from the car, a half-smile on my lips as I thought of J. Ronald Briggs, the mad captain of the *Paula*. Because he was one of the few friends I had found in these last weeks. I wanted to say good-by to him and also hear about Kay.

Just as I remembered it, the walk down the sloping way was rocking in the tide. At the far end was a silhouetted boat that just might be the *Paula*. Excitedly, I clomped along the uncertain, raftlike walk toward the boat which was lit up like a Christmas tree. Blatantly loud phonograph music was spewing out into the night, throwing itself upon the gentle waves viciously. It was triumphantly gaudy, raucous music that made me frown in wonderment. This couldn't be the *Paula*, that music just wasn't in J. Ronald's library. *False Triste*, yes, but not, of all things, "Begin the Beguine."

When I reached her, I bent down and, with my lighter, made out the dashing written word: *Paula*. It was the mad boat, all right; he must have rented it out for the evening. I turned away to leave, when the low, throaty laugh of a woman floated up the stairs, followed by a man's bellowing laughter. It was Briggs after all! Oh well, what the hell, he wouldn't mind, not for a few minutes anyway. I stepped aboard and without looking down, called out:

"A'oy, skipper of the *Paula*, are you aboard?"

The music stopped abruptly and Briggs called up, "Who's there, friend or foe?"

"Friend, I guess. It's Robbins!" I said, grinning.

"Name of heaven!" he shouted. "And alive!"

"May I board the *Paula*?"

"Come below, Robbins, my home is yours!"

I stepped from the swirling darkness and stood blinking foolishly for a moment at what my overworked eyes showed. Briggs was just untangling himself from the circling grasp of a pair of eager white arms. Their owner wasn't bad, not at all. Her face was slender, holding a sort of passionate loneli-

ness. Her full mouth was sulkily beautiful, and her nose was almost classic. Add all those and her dark eyes, the sort that looked into a man and seemed to say: I'll listen, what's your purpose, add them all up, and you get a really good-looking woman. She arose and stretched like a beautiful cat. I half-expected to hear her let out with a low purr.

"Billy!" Briggs shouted. "You made it back, I knew you would!" he crowed in triumph.

"Was there anything else to do, J. Ronald?" I asked.

"For you, no!"

The woman standing beside him was searching my face, probing into my thoughts. She must have been satisfied, because she smiled up at me just as J. Ronald remembered his manners.

"Billy, I want you to meet Norma Borja, an old friend. Norma, this is Billy Robbins. I told you a little about him."

"You seem to lead a full life, Mr. Robbins," she said. Her low voice chased a couple of thrills up and down my back.

"Not of my own choosing, Norma, and no one has called me Mr. Robbins since I graduated from reform school."

"A sense of humor, too," she smiled.

"No, I mean it. They salted me away for two years. I burled once too often when I was a kid. Borja," I mused. "Any relation to Cesare Borgia, Norma?"

She smiled as if she had heard it before. "Just a little one, Billy, I don't like to talk about him, he would have done better if he hadn't listened to a woman."

She smiled and hooked her arm in J. Ronald's. He had been watching our loose talk with a half-smile, then he jumped into frenzied action.

"Celebration, we've got to have a celebration!" he yelled. "Line up, people, we're servin'!"

He pushed us on a bunk and went to work with the clinking bottles. The waves slapped the sides of the boat in high glee, keeping time with his small patter. Some magical change had come over the man Briggs since I had last looked upon his morose features. He had shed his heavy heart and was once again living. Could this be the woman? Uh-uh, somehow she didn't look like the woman who could leave a man's heart empty and twisted like a gourd. She said something I didn't quite get, and I said, "Pardon me, I didn't understand you."

"I asked if Jimmy told you about me."

Play it close, Robbins, you can never tell.

"I really don't think so, Norma, but then I'm not sure. When I was with him, there was a lot on my mind. Should he have told me about you?"

She shrugged. "Not especially, I just wondered. You were in Mexico, weren't you?"

"For a few easy weeks. I wish to God I could have stayed there."

"I was there last year. Did you get to Cholula, the Hidden Convent of Santa Monica?"

"No, I missed those, I . . ."

We "Mexicoed" for the next five minutes. J. Ronald hooked the drinks and sat on the bunk across from us, his eager eyes following our conversation and shifting to each of us in turn. We dropped Mexico, and as the drinks flowed more freely, we talked of boats and cars, whisky and men, until the talk became too small, and we all knew what was being postponed.

Finally I said, "Kay?"

He nodded.

"Taken care of?"

"Yes, I buried her at Happy Dale, about ten miles east of Los Angeles."

"Thanks for everything." My heart was heavy, and I downed my drink. Sweet Kay, wonderful and loving. "Did you have any

trouble getting her buried?" I asked abruptly.

"A little, but I made out all right. She was my sister, Nancy White, and this was her third marriage. I owe you sixty-seven dollars," he finished lamely.

"Buy a new phonograph when this one wears out. She would like that, I think."

The air was leaden and Norma stirred nervously. Suddenly J. Ronald exploded upward and slammed the record over. In a second the night air was once again filled with music, and we were laughing and talking.

The empty bottles had been dropped up next to J. Ronald before I was drunk enough to ask the question that had been gnawing at me all evening.

"Your eyes, J. Ronald, they've changed. What happened to them?"

"That's what we're wearing this season, like 'em this way?"

"Sure, they're not sad any more."

"Was he carrying the torch, Billy?" Norma asked.

"I wouldn't know, but something's sure happened."

"Maybe he's glad that I came all the way from Washington, D. C., to look him up, the snake," she said, looking at him fondly.

Oh, oh, it's the other one, the friend of the "politicians," the one who worked for the lobbyist. So she came back. Well, may they both be happy.

Suddenly a brain wave smacked me between the eyes. It was good, but it had to be worked just right.

"Is there going to be a wedding?" I asked them.

"Wednesday, we got the license in Santa Ana yesterday," Briggs said.

"I'm happy for you. Wednesday, hmmm?"

"Not Thursday. Hey!" he shouted. "You've got to be my best man!"

I hated it, but there was only one answer. "I'd like to, but I won't be here, J. Ronald."

He was disappointed and showed it. He grunted and took another drink.

"I was sober when I came in here, wasn't I, folks?"

"Uh-huh, I guess so," he answered glumly.

"I've got a wedding present for you. I was going to give it to J. Ronald," I explained to Norma, "but now that there's going to be a family, it's for my two best friends!"

"Yeah? Thanks," he grunted.

"Jimmy, is that any way to thank Billy?" she asked. She got up and wrapped her white arms about his neck and gave him one of those open-mouth kisses that every little boy shoots for. When she let him go, he grinned and ran his finger in his suddenly too-tight collar.

"It's out in the car, got to go, be right back," I mumbled. "Wait!"

I whipped around and clambered up the steps, ran to the car and searched the glove compartment. In a couple of minutes I was back with the ownership slips to the car. I didn't need a car any worse than I needed death; maybe this would finance him a little.

"O.K., dear people," I grinned. "Rise and take it!"

They both smiled and stood up, weaving slightly. Norma hooked her arm in his and smiled up at me.

"Because I can't be at your wedding, because you're nice people, and furthermore because I'm going away, I present to you, with suitable flourish, a beautiful, convertible Oldsmobile. I love you, let's have a drink!"

It took a good two hours to get them to accept the car and another two of drinking to seal the bargain. When we at last slept, J. Ronald and I on one bunk and Norma on the other, it was very late, and the little waves were slapping hard against the hull. They were talking to me in their whispering way and said, *One day less, Billy. One day nearer*

eternity! One day less of the life you love.

Norma took the car the next morning and drove into Newport for more provisions, mainly liquid type, and also to mail the ownership slips back to Nevada for changing. J. Ronald and I sat on the deck, sunning our backs and cooling our stomachs with sun and beer in that order. He mentioned the folly of it all, and it was easier to agree with him than argue. He opened another couple of cans and flopped down.

"How do you like Norma, Billy?"

"Seems damned nice. You mean you kicked her out once, you fool?"

Don't put it so hard, I had great plans then. I wasn't getting anywhere. All of a sudden I was going to be a man of destiny, Wall Street, cornered markets, bears and bulls and grain and all the crap that goes with it. I was going to be Young Mr. Big of Wall Street. But my father ruined all of that," he sighed, taking another gurgling swallow of beer and smacking his lips.

"Why, didn't he want you to have ulcers and thrombosis?"

"It wasn't that. He died and left me a hundred thousand dollars. I haven't turned a hand since."

"A hundred grand!" I screamed. "Why in the name of heaven do you live like this, hanging around the water front and chartering the *Paula* when some stick-hick wants to take a ride?"

He shrugged. "She earns her keep that way. Someone in the family has to."

I groaned, then saw the humor that went along with the tale and grinned. "How did Norma happen to come back?"

"Just like I told you once. Remember when I said she would retire, then come back and try to get me on the end of her money-baited hook? I didn't have any money when I first knew her. Well, she came back, and then fell for me all over again. This time I went for her in one helluva big way!"

"And it doesn't make any difference to you what trade she was in?"

"Would it to you? Truthful now."

"No," I said, pondering a minute. "Come to think of it, I guess not."

"Hell, Billy, I'm damned proud of her. It's not every woman who can take a broken heart and parley it into a fortune. She can match me dollar for dollar. Her last coup did it; she swung a million-dollar bid of graft the right way, and they gave her fifty thousand dollars for her share—*sub rosa*. Know what *sub rosa* means? Tax free!"

"Smart girl!" I admitted.

"Yeah," he agreed. "Now what's the deal with you? Make it good, it's not every day I lose a best man."

"Oh, a little of this and a lot of that."

"What about Marco?"

Yeah, what about Marco? I sat, squinting into the copper sun for a long minute, my thoughts on that lonely hill a few days in the future. I started telling my friend about it, slowly at first and then with growing speed until the words spilled over themselves, and I had to stop for breath. He looked at me with pity, shuddered visibly and leaned back.

"You damned fool," he swore softly. "You poor damned fool, you don't have a chance. God help you!"

"It's not much, but it's the only fair way I know. If you've got a better idea, spill it."

"Have you ever killed a man?" he asked softly.

"No real ones, more than a few in my stories."

"Wait then," he warned solemnly. "You'll see Marco line up in your sights, you'll slowly squeeze on the trigger—and he'll turn into some sort of a god. Your hands will be shaking, and your body will commence to shake. You won't be able to do a thing except lay your gun down. If you're like me, you'll deliberately fire the gun and stand up, hoping

he will kill you, because you really killed him by letting him live. It's hard to explain, it happened to me once in Germany."

I took a deep breath and turned to him. "I'll risk it, it's the only way."

"You madman, why didn't you take Mike Abrams up on his offer? You said it was the same as giving you back your life!"

"Sorry, I just couldn't. Did you ever kill a man after that?"

"Yeah, I got around to murdering a couple of platoons of the poor bastards. They come back to me now and then at nights, especially after I've been drinking. They don't hate me, I'm grateful for that. They just stand around the bed and look down at me. It's pretty eerie, particularly when you've got a snootful."

I laughed nervously, then felt a little sick. It would be plain hell if I happened to kill Marco and then had to suffer with his ghost forever. God, what plain, complete, unadulterated hell!

Tuesday afternoon, J. Ronald, Norma, and I drove to Hermosa Beach. They cooled off in a bar while I went around the block to pick up my death warrant. Somehow I knew that Marco would keep his word; I didn't even bother to "case" the post office.

My demanding the fifty thousand dollars wasn't greed, believe me, but there wasn't any reason, as far as I was concerned, why Marco should have the privilege of killing me without paying a little for the fun. I hardly glanced at the check, a sheet of paper attracted my eyes magnet-like. The half dozen words scrawled hatefully took up half the page: *I'll be seeing you Tuesday night* was all he wrote. I ran a trembling hand across my suddenly damp forehead and tried to grin, but failed miserably.

My next steps were mathematically aligned: I made out a certified check to Varna for every cent, stopped in a sporting goods store and bought a .45 and box of ammunition, dropped the check in a corner mailbox—and went to the bar for a last few drinks.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The wind was rising and turning cold; it swept through my clothes like icicles suddenly gone berserk. High aloft, winds were buffeting majestic clouds which were silver-gray under the pale, frigid light of the unearthly moon. In the valley below the fog crept in, a nocturnal invader which sent out its obscenely white fingers into every nook. Now and then the moon disappeared, plunging everything into hellish darkness before reappearing triumphantly, leaving jagged holes in the clouds where it had ripped through.

Eleven o'clock. A night bird cut through the darkness, its wings whirring a death song. The appointed hour passed quietly like a rubber-tired hearse, and the silence of a thousand graves was upon the wooded grove. Ten million eyes were peering down at me, and their ghostly look fell hard on my soul. I felt like screaming, and suddenly there was the pulling desire to run toward the canyon and stumble down its steep sides, running through the ravine until I came to someone's home, warm fire, and safety.

But running was no good, this was Marco's game: wait the enemy out, wear his nerves down until they are raw and aching, then move in for the kill, come in snarling with your gun slamming out death.

The original Acapulco idea had been to get Marco out of the city, away from his usual haunts, miles away from the streets and buildings, and make him face me where he would be most unsure of himself and, most important of all, in a place of my own choosing.

My prone body ached, and trying to soothe it, I stretched my hand into the darkness. It touched a smooth rock the size of an apple. It clung in my hand as the nucleus of an idea spun into meaning. I raised from the ground, brought my head above the protecting thicket and tossed it across a large clearing that formed a sort of stage in the grove. It scudded across the ground and skittered through fallen leaves, sounding for all the world like a running man.

And then Marco struck! Fifty feet away a flash of fire and a muzzle roar hit the night and split it wide open as the shots echoed away and down the ravine. I blindly fired three times into the darkness, then ran in a crouching position to hide behind my God-blessed thicket, some fifteen feet from where I had fired the gun.

The instant the .45 rocked back in my hand, spewing death and burnt powder, I felt a new strength and was no longer held in the icy grip of fear. The new man Robbins quietly pulled the clip out and reloaded the gun, then leaned against a tree and commenced to shake with silent laughter.

Damn you, Marco, I'm equal to you for the first time. I'll fight you now, I'm no longer afraid. When you fell for that oldest of tricks, you turned from a god into a human being. You can be wrong, Marco!

The moon slid from the black edge of a cloud. It shot its cold light into the grove. A second had passed from total darkness to brilliant moonlight, and Marco was caught almost dead in the center of the clearing. I flashed my gun and excitedly, without aiming, yanked the trigger until the clip was empty.

My shots ate the dirt around him and sang out into the night. He wheeled to face me just as the moon died again. I streaked away from the spot, cursing myself and almost casually counted his shots, one—two—three, and four. The final bullet buried itself inches from my head.

I refilled the clip as quietly as I could, and with the automatic held tightly in my hand, crawled slowly, picking my way, to the edge of the grove overlooking the rocky edges of the ravine. My eyes followed the moon across a cloud, through its phase of darkness, moment of brilliance and back into another cloud. It disappeared. I made a scrambling dash for a large tree ten feet away and stood with my back to it, regaining my panting breath as I looked down into the black ravine. Its steep walls started about three feet from me, and slanted off into the unknown darkness. I smiled a little grimly and bent to choose half a dozen small rocks.

Before letting them trickle from my hand, I let out with an unearthly scream and scuffed my feet as if I were falling into the darkness below. The combined sounds hit the night silence hard and vibrated across the gorge into the hills.

Almost at once there was a nervous rustling a few yards away. I melted into the tree, my every sense tightly alert and ready for action.

I shifted the gun in my moist grip. There was a stealthy sound directly behind me. I froze, became part of the tree even more than I had been, and ceased breathing. I had worked myself into a very neat trap! Marco was hiding on the opposite side of the tree; his heavy breathing was all I needed to make me raise the gun to my temple and pull the trigger.

His feet moved slowly, one step, another, and . . . I raised the gun and fired directly toward the huge hulk that should have been on the butcher's hook. But my arm must have made a warning shadow; with the speed of my own murderous thoughts, Marco leaped back, the shots tore through the trees, and there was nothing but night where he had stood.

"Not yet, you smart bastard!" he roared.

I whirled about, my gun arm hit the tree, my feet lost their footing on the precarious edge and desperately fought against the fall. They slipped; I made a final grab for the tree and then fell, a scream of fear rocketing out of my lungs.

Over the edge and down I went. Rocks clawed at my body and cut deeply into me. Bushes and dead limbs jabbed at me and the hard jagged surface tried its level best to lacerate me into raw steak. Head over heels and arms over head I rolled, gaining momentum and dangerous speed as I fell.

Marco stood somewhere high above me, firing wildly into the darkness. I was calm as the shots snarled about me; two, three, four bit into the earth beside me, another stung a boulder and flung molten lead in my cheek. Five, six, another flew over my head and behind me; seven—out into the night. Eight wasn't even close, and then, mercifully, there were no more.

At the bottom, I was bleeding and bent, but gracious thanks to God, not broken. For a long moment I lay, panting and half sobbing, then crawled painfully behind a boulder and peered out just as the moon came forth again and revealed Marco standing on the edge of the ravine. I steadied my weaving gun and fired. The shots rocked away and scored nothing more than three near hits. Marco jumped back and cursed, waving his empty gun.

I cupped my hands and screamed up at him. "Come and get me, you dirty pig!"

"Damn you, I will, you . . ." His final words were drowned out and swallowed up by two more shots from my gun. He leaped behind the trees and loaded his clip. Then he crawled to the edge of the ravine and slid down. I tried to draw a bead on his twisting body and pulled the trigger just as he stumbled and fell face first into a thicket. He picked himself up, cursed and dove behind a boulder. His head popped up, and I fired again.

"You can't stop Tony di Marco that way!" he screamed.

"You'll only stop one, you woman murderer!" I yelled back.

"I'll get you, Robbins, you might as well come out."

"To hell with you, Marco," I laughed back. "And come to think of it, they'd kick you out of there."

His cursing filled the night, and even though I didn't know much Italian, I realized

that he hadn't repeated himself once. I grinned and reloaded my gun. In too many movies nice guys had died because of empty clips, and I had no desire to make myself another statistic because of forgetfulness.

A dozen feet away and below was a dry river gulch. I looked away, then back again as an idea hot as fire shot through me. Army generals as far back as Alexander had probably used the same technique on a larger scale, but with the same purpose in mind. *Outflank the enemy!*

I crawled away from the boulder and picked my way toward the gulch, brushing the dry twigs from my path. I raised and fired twice at the still cursing voice, then slid into the gulch. Once in it, I traveled faster, half crawling, half running on the quiet sand until I came parallel to where I figured his hiding place was. He had stopped screaming his hate, and once again the wind rose, carrying the overtones of death on its whirling wings.

I stopped behind a scrub bush and cautiously peered through it. At that instant the moon shot out, and I saw him. His eyes were glaring nervously in my direction. I was immobile; my life was at stake there in the shimmering moonlight. Then it was dark again, and I quickly shifted a few feet away, raised the gun and laid it against the sandy bank of the gulch.

I kept one eye on the sky; it lightened, and I jerked my eyes back to Marco. He was unsure of himself, but probably some animal instinct warned him of danger. His hand went inside his coat and brought out a small, round object. I frowned, then caught him in my sights. They were blurred, and he was sharp against them.

God, forgive me. I murder!

He slipped his gun in the shoulder holster, half started to crawl toward my own private gulch, changed his mind and looked around the boulder to where I had been hidden. He took the dark thing in both hands and held it carefully, his every sense alert.

This was the moment!

"Marco!" I screamed. "Here it comes!"

In the second I fired, he jerked one hand from the object, and I realized what he had. The slug from my gun threw him back. He reeled to his feet, drew back his arm, and I fired a second time. It hit him high in the shoulder, he spun about, crumpled to his knees and fell forward.

There was a muffled explosion, his body jerked upward as if pulled by a master pup-

peteer, then sank back to the ground. He had tried to get me with a grenade!

I scrambled from the gulch and ran to him, threw my gun aside and turned him over. His breath was coming hard, and one great paw was groping in the hole that had been his stomach, trying vainly to push the tangled mass back inside. I leaned him against the boulder and bent low to look at his face. It was twisted and ugly, a tortured masklike caricature of a human face. He groaned, and his body convulsed.

"Tony," I said softly.

He groaned, and his teeth ground together in agony.

"Where'd I get you?"

" . . . Shoulder—arm." The pain grabbed him again, and he screamed in agony. "Oh, good God, kill me now! I can't stand it, shoot me!" he pleaded.

Then with a frightful scream, he jerked away and retched. Dark blood spurted from his throat, his eyes flared up, and faded. He barely made one more breath, then, with a final spasm, he died.

With my bare hands, I dug a grave for him in the sandy gulch and buried him with the black automatic in his right hand. His left hand was still clutching his stomach, which lay ripped and open until the coarse sand filled the gaping hole.

It was gray dawn when I patted the last bit of sand and earth into place. My unsteady hand traced a faint cross over the grave, and I said a prayer to my God for him. I sincerely hoped that it would help him, wherever he was.

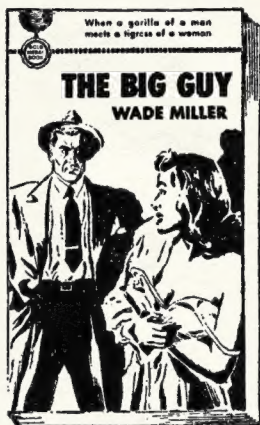
"Sorry, Tony," I whispered. "Sorry it had to be this way. Good-by."

I buried my gun deep in the sand and tramped away over the hills toward the ocean. As I stood on the crest of the hill, the sun broke through the mist, and I turned to face it. But somehow, there was no meaning, the zest for living was strangely missing.

I picked my way down the rocky ledges to my ocean. More than once she had cleared my mind. The water was cool and clean as I swam away from the filthy land, met each breaker squarely until they lessened, and I rode the gentle swells. I rolled over on my back and closed my eyes. For the first time in weeks, my mind was clearing, and as the water and sand touched me, a peaceful restfulness came to my soul.

Then I started back to get Varna. She would help me through what lay ahead.

THE END



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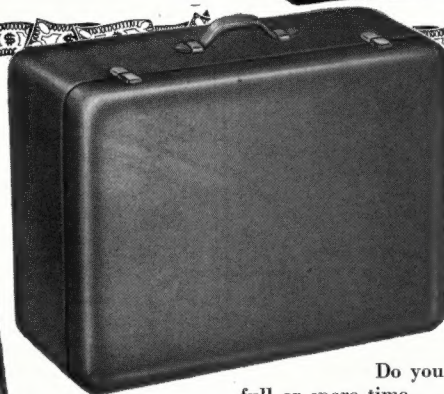
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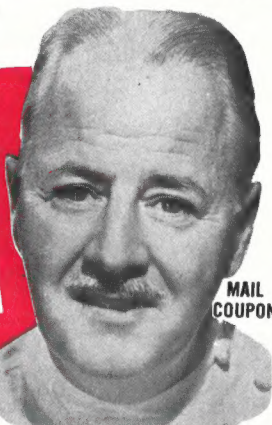


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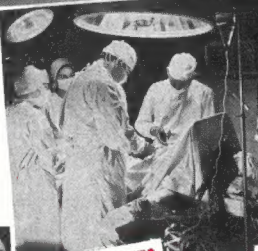
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